MANUSCRIPTS

Ink runs from the corners of my mouth.
There is no happiness like mine.
I have been eating poetry.

—Mark Strand
Eating Poetry, 1968

BUTLER UNIVERSITY

Manuscripts

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A Shell

by Betty Garrigus

Many times at night after reading or drawing late, I sit on the stairs of my split level house feeling snug. Enclosed in the narrow ascending stair space wrapped round by my house of sleeping children, with arms wrapping my knees and my head touching elbows and knees, I feel tightly curled like the beginning spiral of a shell. A sense of separate beginning and aloneness. A structured strength of being. Myself the tiny first round turn, then the house curling me, and the darkness winding, wrapping, whirling round us all.

When the Dark's All Done

by Mary Zdrojkowski

4:00 a.m.

Lucy lay squished against the far side of the king size bed she and her husband, Russ, had bought so they could sleep in stretched-out comfort. She had been five months pregnant with their second child and, in the store at least, the bed had seemed more than sufficient space-wise. She remembered the awkward feeling of trying out the bed while the salesman stood close by and how Russ, in typical fashion, had just stood there also letting her ask all the questions.

Lucy woke and saw their six-year-old daughter, Jenny, sleeping sideways and their four-year-old son, Timmy, nested in at the foot of the bed. Lucy sighed forcefully as much to vent her frustration as to awaken Russ. Getting no response, she got up ahd hauled the children back to their beds. She resented that she was the one who always had to haul the kids out, always had to tell them to brush their teeth, always had to go to school conferences, always had to clean up the baby's puke. It was as if Russ weren't even there.

Lucy returned to bed and tried to return to sleep. Russ's snoring set her thinking that life with him during the day wasn't a whole lot different; when she wanted to talk, he might just as well be asleep for all the effort he put into the conversation.

6:30 a.m.

The alarm went off, waking Lucy who had just fallen back asleep. She, in turn, went in and woke Jenny for school. Russ was already downstairs reading the paper. He had made coffee, for which Lucy was grateful, and a mess, for which she was not.

Lucy began to make breakfast while Russ read, and Jenny whined because she couldn't find her shoes. "Ask your father to help you, Jenny," said Lucy.

The baby started crying upstairs at the same time the toast popped up. Lucy hurriedly buttered the four pieces, stuck them in the oven on warm, took the boiling oatmeal off the burner and started towards the upstairs to get the baby. On her way she noted a shoeless Jenny watching cartoons and a prone Russ with the paper turned inside out and quartered to the crossword puzzle.

"Do I have to do everything around here?" Lucy said somewhat rhetorically and added more directly, "Russ, can't you at least help Jenny find her shoes?" He muttered something and threw the paper down in reply.

Lucy stomped up the stairs and stepped barefooted in the dirty diaper that a proud Timmy had taken off the baby and left on the floor.

7:30 a.m.

Jenny's schoolbus arrived, and she departed. Russ exchanged his robe and slippers for a three-piece suit and a pair of wingtips, planted

a round of kisses carefully avoiding getting his tie glazed by the baby's snot, and left for the "real world," leaving Lucy in what she logically extrapolated must be the "unreal world."

Lucy watched her husband of ten years drive away and moments later become a mere dot on the horizon in the picture window. She wondered if in his rear view mirror she, too, shrank to nothingness. She gave a shrug, turned slightly and stopped when she noticed the reflected light from the television behind her turned the window into a mirror. A moment ago the window had framed a scene from outside, her freshest memory of Russ. Now the view was of the inside and Lucy studied what Russ must have seen.

Lucy saw her short brown hair matted against her head from sleeping and a used Kleenex peeking out of the pocket of her faded robe, which hung on her like a wet paper towel. Timmy, his back towards the window, was oblivious to the graham cracker crumbs cascading down his chin as he sat absorbed by the television show and the man in the cardigan sweater telling him that "you are special." The baby was lying on the floor, his rounded tummy holding him too high for his flailing limbs to help him crawl and looking like a turtle on its back in reverse. Lucy saw the baby spit up and wished the milky little puddle were just on the window and not running into the carpet fibers.

8:00 a.m.

Lucy went about housecleaning with the intensity of a good work out. She warmed up by bending and stretching to pick up clothes, toys and the detritus of children. Twenty minutes of vigorous floor scrubbing, dusting, vacuuming and stair climbing worked her aerobically and left her sweating. She cooled down by dressing the kids and unloading the dishwasher. She surveyed the house and the order which had emerged from the previous chaos and felt good.

Lucy put the baby down for his morning nap, plugged Timmy into some story books with corresponding cassettes and went upstairs to shower. She luxuriated in the steam and could hardly see around the bathroom when she had finished. She opened the door to let some of it escape and dried off.

As the vapor gradually dispersed, the foggy mirror began to clear from the bottom up. Lucy saw parts of her begin to appear and tried to appraise them as Russ might. First to come into sight were her legs — long, lean and not yet marked by veins. Next, hips — gravity and three kids had taken their toll, but still nothing to be alarmed about. Her belly was a little saggy and showed some stripes of motherhood, but nothing a swimming suit couldn't hide. Lucy had regretted her smallish breasts, but when she saw them to be yet high and firm, she decided the pendulous boobs of older women weren't anything to rave about. Her arms were nicely toned, neck smooth and face a little thinner than her college days.

Russ used to tell her that a man could fall into her big blue eyes and drown. She wondered if he still felt that way. Except for a small mark

on her cheek where last week Dr. Clark removed a mole, her face looked pretty much the same as it had ten years ago. All her friends told her she looked young. All her friends except Russ.

10:30 a.m.

"Mommie, I wanna go to the park," said Timmy as he crawled up on the couch and rattled the newspaper Lucy was reading.

"Mommie wants to finish reading the paper," said Lucy.

"But I wanna go now," he whined trying to crawl into her lap.

She pushed the child off her lap and began the same paragraph for the fourth time.

"I WANNA GO NOW," he demanded and kicked her leg for emphasis.

As Lucy slammed down the paper, sprang from the couch and tried to grab the fleeing boy, the baby's cry from upstairs and the phone ringing in the kitchen caused her to halt her step in mid-air indecision. When her foot came down, she was headed for the kitchen.

"Lucy? Dr. Clark here."

The small boy buzzing around the kitchen and the screaming baby upstairs faded into the background as Lucy's senses became focused on the call. Doctors don't call. Receptionists or nurses call, but doctors don't unless it's serious.

"Yes. What is it?" she asked. Lucy felt her heart begin to beat faster.

"Hopefully it's nothing, Lucy," began Dr. Clark, "but I want to be sure. I sent a sample of tissue to the lab and the report just came back."

"But you said it was just a mole and nothing to worry about," said Lucy, waiting for him to quell the fear that was beginning to reach her conscious mind.

"Lucy, there might well be nothing to worry about. The report said that the specimen was a carcinoma *in situ* which simply means . . ."

"Cancer."

"Very early stage cancer, Lucy. There is a difference. This should be highly treatable."

"How is it treated, Dr. Clark?" Lucy asked as she touched the small spot on her cheek. She thought of how her mother had, over a matter of weeks, been gradually whittled away under a surgeon's knife.

"That depends on how far, if at all, it has advanced. Lucy, can you come in tomorrow for some further tests? I don't mean to alarm you, but I think you'll feel better."

"Yes, of course. I'll be there." Lucy hung up the phone, grabbed the still racing Timmy and held him close against her as she tried to stop shaking.

2:00 p.m.

Lucy kept busy so the dangerous "what if" questions simmering just below her conscious thought would not rise and cause her to fall apart before Russ got home. She fed the kids lunch, then cleaned the

refrigerator, jettisoning the leftovers of questionable age. She sharpened pencils, updated her sitter list, straightened the linen closet and took down the kitchen curtains to wash. She realized that the last time she had washed the curtains was just before the baby was born and she knew she would be gone for a few days.

Lucy tried to call Russ. She needed more than the doctor's standard assurance of "nothing to worry about." She needed Russ to tell her how much he loved her and that he always would.

Russ was in a meeting.

4:00 p.m.

Jenny and Timmy watched cartoons while the baby bounced in his walker and swatted at the toys stuck on with suction cups. Lucy was in the kitchen fixing dinner and everything had fallen into the comfort of the evening routine. Russ would be home soon and Lucy felt she could be positive until then.

Lucy selected a large potato to bake for the three kids to split. As she scrubbed it, she noticed a bad spot on it. She began to cut it out with a knife and realized the spot extended nearly all the way through the vegetable. Lucy jammed the potato into the disposal, turned it on, and felt a wave of nausea rush through her.

6:00 p.m.

Lucy paced in front of the window waiting for Russ to come home. As she saw his car approaching, her first impulse was to run out and meet him and blurt everything out at once. She was held back, though, by the realization that they could talk more rationally after the kids were in bed and not there to interrupt.

Russ walked in the door and was tackled by Jenny and Timmy whose shouts of "Daddy's home" drowned out all six kids in the *Brady Bunch.* Lucy went about putting dinner on the table and within five minutes had everyone seated and eating. She was grateful for the spilled milk, bickering and fussiness of her children; it added to her feeling that all was normal.

7:00 p.m.

Lucy washed Jenny's long dark hair — hair the same color as her own. Combing out her daughter's hair had been a special time for Lucy. The ritual was somehow intensely private; a quiet moment between mother and daughter when they shared secrets. Tonight Lucy wondered, "How much longer will she be little? Will Jenny one day have a little girl whose hair she'll comb?"

And welling up inside Lucy, gaining momentum against her effort to control it was the question, "What if I die — who will love my child and fix her hair and share her dreams?"

7:30 p.m.

Lucy readied Jenny and Timmy for bed drawing out the ritual. With a sudden urge to linger on this quiet time, she found herself saying, "Yes, one more story. Yes, four more kisses. Yes, I love you, I love you, I love you."

She picked up her infant son and held him as if he were a dancing partner — her cheek against his tiny one. Though his feet hung down no further than her ribs, his giggle reverberated through their touching cheekbones and went gently coursing down to her toes.

8:00 p.m.

Her babies asleep, she went down to Russ.

Lucy was surprised at how calmly she related her previous conversation with Dr. Clark to Russ. At the word cancer, he turned from the football game on television and looked straight into Lucy's eyes. She felt as if he were looking deeply into her, almost to her very soul. When he said, "Don't worry. It won't do any good and everything will be all right," she felt as if she had perceived something that wasn't there. She had wanted him to say something less shallow, something that didn't ring so hollow in her ears. What Lucy longed for was a verbal potion or word elixir to ease her fear; what she got was a pat on the head.

9:00 p.m.

Lucy got ready for bed and stood in front of the mirror examining the mark on her face. She wished she had microscopic vision and could pick up any stray cells. Everything looked normal, but would it tomorrow?

She went to bed glad that Russ was still downstairs. She found it hard to be close to him when the chasm between them was so wide.

1:00 a.m.

Lucy woke up disoriented. The darkness told her that morning was still a long way off, and her extended leg told her that she was alone. Fear flared in her heart, and she knew why. Lucy could no longer distract herself or find something else to do. She tried to erase the images of grieving children, of Russ trying to make dinner, and of herself with parts of her body being carved away in a sterile operating room. The fears became tears and she buried her face in her pillow to muffle the sobbing she could no longer control.

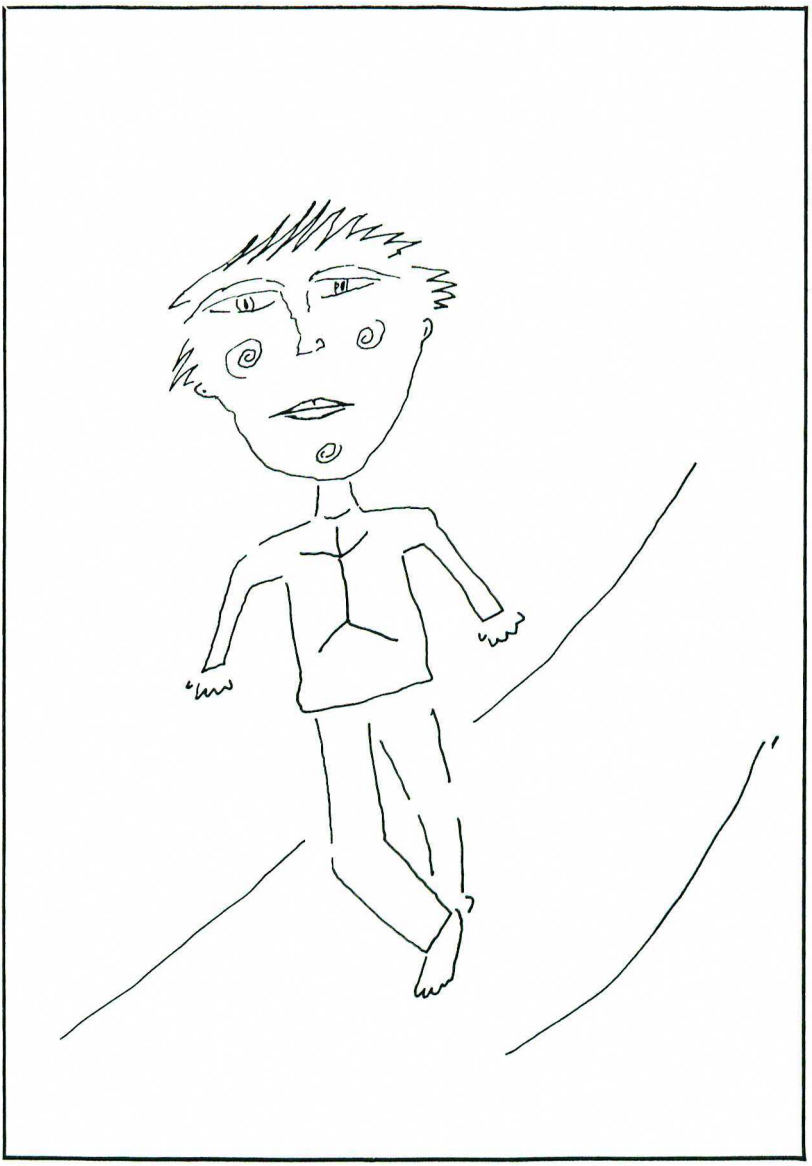
Lucy noticed that it was suddenly hard to breathe. Russ had nested in behind her with his arms around her as if he were a parent restraining a child in a tantrum. She screamed that she was afraid of dying, afraid of becoming something so ugly that he wouldn't be able to look at her, afraid that her children would be motherless.

Russ said nothing throughout Lucy's sobbing, only lay there with his arms around her. And when the dark was done and morning had come, she knew that in the agony of her loneliness, he had held her heart.

A Poem

by Rhet Lickliter

Running like slow motion under words and phrases
that travel like missiles above my head,
they hold onto wire. Entire conversations passing over
my head, up above my reach, as high as the treetops
that once were here, but had to make way for
conversations, dialogues that cover great distances,
across towns and states and countries.
I cannot turn my head to keep up, I cannot blink
my eyes, I cannot spit or whistle. I cannot break into
this conversation, it is gone. I cannot break into that
conversation, it is gone. It is too late to say,
"excuse me . . . " They travel faster than automobiles,
faster than airplanes, much faster than letters and
packages. They travel like gunshots, like bullets.
They take a ride. They hold onto wire. They travel
like missiles overhead, guided, above the long arch
of the earth.



Oda a un Reloj en la Noche

by Pablo Neruda

EN LA NOCHE, en tu mano
brilló como luciérnaga
mi reloj.
Oí
su cuerda:
como un susurro seco
salía
de tu mano invisible.
Tu mano entonces
volvió a mi pecho oscuro
a recoger mi sueño y su latido.

El reloj
siguió cortando el tiempo
con su pequena sierra.
Como en un bosque
caen
fragmentos de madera,
mínimas gotas, trozos
de ramajes o nidos,
sin que cambie el silencio,
sin que la frasca oscuridad termine,
así
siguió el reloj cortando
desde tu mano invisible,
tiempo, tiempo,
y cayeron
minutos como hojas,
fibras de tiempo roto,
pequeñas plumas negras.

Como en el bosque
olíamos raíces,
el agua en algun sitio desprendía
una gotera gruesa
como uva mojada.
Un pequeño molino
molía noche,

Ode to a Watch in the Night

Translated by Lisa Muscara

In the night, in your hand
shone like a glowworm
my watch.
I heard
its ticking
as a dry whisper
it left your invisible hand.
Your hand then
returned to my chest
to get my dream and its beat.

The watch
continued cutting the time
with its little saw.
As in a forest
fall
fragments of wood,
minute drops, pieces
of branches or nests,
without changing the silence,
without ending the cool obscurity,
so
the watch continued cutting
from your invisible hand,
time, time
and fell
minutes like leaves,
fibers of broken time,
little black feathers.

As in the forest
we smelled the scent of roots,
the water in some place unfastened
a dozen leaks
like wet grapes.
A little mill
ground night,

la sombra susurraba
cayendo de tu mano
y llenaba la tierra.
Polvo,
tierra, distancia
molía y molía
mi reloj en la noche,
desde tu mano.

Yo puse
mi brazo
bajo tu cuello invisible,
bajo su peso tibio,
y en mi mano
cayó el tiempo,
la noche,
pequeños ruidos
de madera y de bosque,
de noche dividida,
de fragmentos de sombra,
de agua que cae y cae:
entonces
cayó el sueño
desde el reloj y desde
tus dos manos dormidas,
cayó como agua oscura
de los bosques,
del reloj
a tu cuerpo,
de ti hacia los países,
agua oscura,
tiempo que cae
y corre
adentro de nosotros.
Y así fue aquella noche,
sombra y espacio, tierra
y tiempo,
algo que corre y cae
y pasa.
Y así todas las noches
van por la tierra,
no dejan sino un vago
aroma negro,

the shadow whispered
falling from your hand
and filling the earth.
Dust,
earth, distance
ground and ground
my watch in the night,
from your hand.

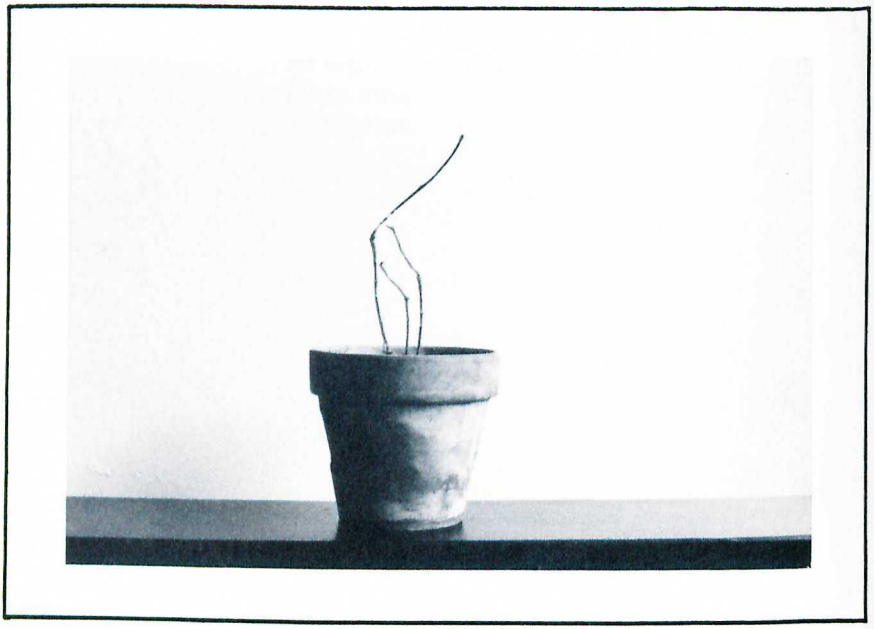
I put
my arm
beneath your invisible neck,
beneath your lukewarm weight,
and in my hand
fell time,
night,
small noises
of wood and forest,
of divided night,
of fragments of shadow,
of water that falls and falls:
then
the dream fell,
from the watch and from
your two sleeping hands,
it fell as obscure water
from the forests,
from the watch,
to your body,
from you toward countries,
obscure water,
time that falls
and runs
inside of us.
And so was that night,
shadow and space, earth
and time,
something that runs and falls
and passes.
And so all nights
go through the earth,
they leave but a vague
black aroma,

cae una hoja,
una gota
en la tierra
apaga su sonido,
duerme el bosque, las aguas,
las praderas,
las campanas,
los ojos.

Te oigo y respiras,
amor mío,
dormimos.

a leaf falls,
a drop
on the earth
turns off its sound,
the forest sleeps, waters,
meadows,
bells,
eyes

I hear you and you breathe,
my love,
we sleep.



A Story

by Rebecca Saalfrank

They'd meet after the nuclear war. With the ruins of the city still smoking all around, he'd somehow find her crouching in a cellar, shivering, sobbing, all alone. He'd limp painfully over to her and gently wrap his only blanket around her shoulders. Then, through her tears, she'd look up at him. . .

No, that's stupid, I thought. My pencil scratched little Freudian circles on the legal pad across my lap. The dorm basement is a lonely cinder block labyrinth, and I sat right in the middle, in the room with the blood-red chairs. Sometimes, a flat, bodiless voice echoed out at me from the labyrinth, swelling into an eerie, gibbering crescendo and then dying away again. The hard red nap of the chair bit into my legs. Somewhere, invisible fingers played an ivory keyboard, and the muffled tune drifted around me—a yearning, three-beat dirge that pulsated in and out like waves on the seashore. The stifling heat pressed down and made me want to gasp for breath.

Write! I ordered myself. But nothing came out. Inside, thousands of isolated images whipped together and churned in a red, indecipherable mass. I watched in curiosity as a small bird tore into the room, a fury of little feathers. Its wings beat the hot air as it wheeled around. Then it streaked toward the black pane of a darkened door and burst in an explosion of feathers against the glass.

I could put them in an aviary, I thought. Or the jungle. With a thousand monkeys chittering in the trees all around... Or, better yet, an alien jungle: they'd crash-land the shuttle, but the third crew member with them would die in the impact. She'd try to scratch out a shallow grave in the rocky soil with her fingers, but her ears would be bleeding badly. And when she'd pass out, he'd limp out painfully from the shuttle and gently pick her up . . .

No, *Mademoiselle* says a story must be real. But what's real? Peter behind the stacks, I thought. Each Tuesday during mid-class break, we separated to two different ends of the library. He stood alone behind the magazines and watched me, and I jabbered absently with my girlfriend as I looked right back. The next week, I would watch from behind the stacks as he strolled about, chattering with **his** friend. When each class finished and we both returned home, I could watch him from across the library again.

But that's no story, I thought—nothing happens. I decided to give my character red hair and name him Peter. One Tuesday, they'd accidentally meet each other behind the stacks. She'd look at Peter and Peter would look at her, and they would both suddenly read each other's minds. They'd feel . . . I need a metaphor here, I thought. A raging fire consuming them both in a moment. An arrow piercing them through the heart. Or fireworks and the revelation they were meant for each other. But all cliches, I thought. Be real: what's a good

metaphor? Love is—I thought for a moment—love is that sweet pressure inside your chest when your heart swells like a bird. . .

Somewhere along the line I drifted off without realizing it. In my dream, I crept across a rickety, rotten plank across a huge tank of fish and then woke to finish my story. Then I woke with a start. The same three-beat dirge cut a muffled undercurrent through the thick, stifling air. Across the room, an unfamiliar figure wearing a grotesque monkey mask stared at me. Thin brown latex wrinkles quivered as the man giggled and drunkenly lurched through a mock monkey dance. He threw an obscene gesture at me and fell to the red carpet. I daydreamed about Peter throwing me a sick gesture and then falling down on the floor before me. Write! I ordered myself, but still nothing came out. *Mademoiselle* says a **good** writer must be objective about her story.

They'd meet in the cafeteria. He'd start silently choking on his food, and she would be the only one to notice anything wrong... The legal pad on my lap filled with little circles, and the hard red nap of my chair bit harder into me. I closed my eyes. Echoing murmurs from the labyrinth rose and fell and danced with the lonely piano dirge in the heat. The heavy musical air pressed down on my chest. Inside, my heart swelled and burst like a bird in a shower of feathers as I searched for some end to the story.

The Annunciation

by Dawn Hutchison

Intense crimson sunlight
scalds
a buckled street
Shattered windowpanes
  on
    every
      block —
One unloved doll
  face down
    in the dust
No Cries
No Anguish
No Terror
    . . . Silence
Up through a tattered flag
    abandoned
        in the soil
a
single
ivory
flower
        stretches
            to the
                sky

Make a List

by Lisa Bucki

She has lists of lists:
What to do before breakfast.
Things to accomplish by lunch.
Musts by dinner.
Ways to relax before bed.
Christmas presents to buy now!

She has her curlers
in her hair so often
that you'd swear
she has a pink tint
or was meant by the stars
to be a hairdresser.

At the top of tomorrow's list:
Make all lists for next week.

In the end,
her dinner gets cooked,
her husband's shirts are mended,
and the kids' toys are put away.

But her hair remains in curlers,
she never buys that new dress,
and the lists keep coming
on and on.

A Poem

by Ed Steele

There is a mirror
in the corner
of my room
it watches there
this room is solid,
but in the corner
the mirror
the rusted
motorcycle mirror
bends the walls
blurrs the edges
sucks the books
into an oblong
of ambiguity
in the mirror
the window is distant
small blind
not even the green
of the tree outside
is visible

Home Rounds

by Rebecca Saalfrank

"Morning, Hilda!"

The nurse's crisp polyester pants rustled and cracked as she twisted around and pulled the aluminum serving cart into the room backwards. One of the wheels on the cart stuck halfway through the turn, skidding stubbornly over the polished floor and across the threshold. The nurse turned away from the brightening corridor she had just left and looked over to her immediate right. Meaty Mrs. Lessing lay dully in her bed there, her hip sunk deep into the soiled sheets and her thick hand placed heavily on the pillow beside her iron-grey hair. Because of her incontinence, the nurses no longer even put any clothes on her below the waist; now, with her sheets kicked down to her ankles, she looked like a huge bleached whale beached on the bed. The nurse walked over and gently pulled the sheets back up over her.

"I said, GOOD MORNING, HILDA!"

"What?"

The nurse turned around, grasped the white fabric that hid the rear of the room and pulled the curtain back along its track toward the wall. The metal curtain hooks whizzed and then clattered and jumped crazily up and down as they reached the end of the oiled track. In the mustard light filtering through the curtained window, an old woman lay with her quizzical face turned toward the nurse. She blinked from behind thick glasses that magnified and distorted her eyes, making them look like run-together watercolors or melted brown poached eggs. Thin brown hair frizzed up from her head like cotton, and blue-veined turkey flesh jiggled beneath her arm bones.

"Do you want to get up today?" The nurse tore the window curtains open, and cold sunlight spilled into the stuffy room. "I said, DO YOU WANT TO GET UP TODAY?"

"Are you my new nurse?"

The nurse crossed over to Hilda's bed and smiled down at the brown hair. "No, I've been working here a good while now. Don't you remember?" The watercolor eyes turned toward the other bed.

"Do you know my roommate? She kept me awake half the night, moaning. She talks to herself, too, but no one understands her." The nurse looked over to the bleached whale, exposed once again.

"Here, Hilda, I have to get you up. It's the rules. I have to make your bed."

The nurse rolled the vinyl-seated wheelchair over from its corner and set it next to the bed. With a chonk-chonk, she tugged the levers that locked the wheels, one on each side of the chair. She unfolded the crocheted lap quilt in the seat, spread it across the foot of the bed, and pulled the wheelchair's right footrest straight out, the way Hilda liked it. Then the nurse positioned herself next to Hilda's brown

head. She eased her arm under the old woman's neck and gently grasped her opposite shoulder; supporting her backbone thus, the nurse slowly bent Hilda up to a sitting position. With some small amount of tugging and aimless leg-kicking, the two together got Hilda to sit on the edge of her bed. Now, the nurse slid her hand from the woman's shoulder to under the armpit and gently eased the frail body up to a stand. The two stood together swaying a moment, the young woman holding the older one up. Hilda's white slip lay pulled up around her blue hips, where the mattress had caught and lifted it. Then Hilda slid one foot a few inches forward toward the chair. Step by step, Hilda advanced, stooped back into a weak crouching stance, her feet splayed out in front of her and all her weight pushed back onto the nurse's strong arm. With practiced ease, the nurse maneuvered Hilda to the front of the chair, turned her around, and with her arm still firmly behind Hilda's shoulders, lowered her little by little onto the green vinyl seat. The nurse knelt, helped Hilda place her feet on the padded footrests, spread the crocheted lap quilt across Hilda's lap, and with a chonk-chonk unlocked the wheels.

"Mary visited me last night," Hilda commented as the nurse rolled her to the white window. The nurse had no way of knowing whether this was true or not; although Hilda's sister lived in Intensive Care on the far end of the facility, she was still ambulatory and visited her sister occasionally.

"Your plant here is getting dry — I say YOUR PLANT IS DRY. DO YOU WANT ME TO WATER IT FOR YOU?"

"Yes, the nurse gave me that plant. The colored one." Now that was wrong, thought the nurse. A succinct gold card still remained taped to the parched pot: "To Mom — we love you. Charlotte."

The nurse strode back to the aluminum serving cart — covering up the bleached whale once again — and returned with a fresh set of antiseptic white sheets. As she began to strip Hilda's warm, limp sheets off her bed, the nurse noticed the old woman had conjured up a crushed stuffed doll in a fading chalk blue sailor's suit.

"I see you found your Snoopy doll again."

"Yes, he's my little baby. His name is William."

The nurse grinned. "Named him after your son, eh? NAMED HIM AFTER YOUR SON?"

"I don't have a son." The melted eyes looked out guilelessly from behind the thick glass lenses.

"Of course you do. Don't you remember? There's Charlotte, and William, and Suzanne, and Donald. Look, here are pictures of them — I said PICTURES... HERE ON YOUR NIGHTSTAND. There's William. . . . WILLIAM. . ."

"Charlotte's supposed to take me home today. Is she here yet?"

"Charlotte was just here Saturday, visiting. You know that. I gave her some coffee."

Hilda gazed blankly at the photo collage for a long time as the nurse shook open the new sheets. "Why, look — you gave me a picture, too. Is that your husband?"

The nurse tried to laugh, but the guffaw died hollowly. "No, he's a

little old for me. TOO OLD FOR ME! That's my dad. Donald, your youngest — I said THAT'S DONALD. REMEMBER?" The sheets rustled like sails in the waste-and-floor-wax-scented air.

It wasn't until the nurse was tucking in the final trim hospital corner on Hilda's bed that Hilda spoke again. "Is it very cold out?"

"No, but it's icy. I lost control of my car and almost slid into a dump truck on the way over here. I SAID I . . . NEVER MIND."

Hilda gazed through the frost etchings in the corners of the window. "You know, a nice girl like you ought to have a husband — settle down, and raise a family. . . "

"No, I love my work. I HAVE TO GO NOW. DO YOU NEED ANYTHING?"

"Yes, here—" Hilda conjured up a quarter and held it out. "Would you take me home?"

"Let's wait till tomorrow. I said MAYBE TOMORROW." The nurse lifted the dirty sheets from Hilda's bed, carried them over to the aluminum serving cart, and stuffed them onto the bottom shelf. As she pushed the cart out the door, the twisted wheel straightened itself out, but now it caught on the trailing edge of a soiled sheet and skidded stubbornly across the polished floor.

"You know, you're much nicer than the nurse I had last week." Hilda carefully began unbuttoning Snoopy's thin sailor's suit.

"I **was** your nurse last week."

"Mmuurrrrhhhh," moaned Mrs. Lessing, kicking her sheets off.

* * *

"Did she recognize you today?"

The nurse had decided to stop back in during her afternoon break and met the thickly muffled couple on their way out. Their murmurs together bounced flatly off the mustard wall outside Hilda's room. The woman balanced a bundled-up baby on her protruding hip.

"Well, she was doing okay at first," replied the husband behind his moustache, "but toward the end there, she started wandering a little. We thought we'd better leave."

"Yes, and she got so upset when we called her 'Grandma,' " piped in the wife, her eyes glittering. "Does she always do that?"

"Pretty much so, yeah," The nurse flattened out her palm hard, pressed it firmly on the worn, glass-smooth wooden handrail riveted into the wall and slowly began to rub it. She stared at the hand moving heavily back and forth on the wood. The baby yawned. "I think she's getting worse."

"She **is** in her eighties now." The man twiddled his moustache a moment and then sighed. "Well, tell your dad we said hi."

"Yes, we'll have to get another game of bridge going," added his wife. The bundled-up baby yawned again.

The nurse found Hilda sitting bewildered, wheeled back in the corner of the room. The old woman hurriedly stuffed her crushed doll under her lap quilt.

"I SEE YOU HAD SOME VISITORS. LINDA AND MARTY — DO YOU REMEMBER THEM?"

"They had a baby. Cute baby." Hilda's eyes boggled behind the

thick glass lenses. "I have a little baby, too. His name is William."

The nurse smiled at the thin brown hair, frizzed as though by a light socket. "I know. They're serving popcorn down the hall. POPCORN. Do you want some popcorn? I'LL GET YOU SOME POPCORN."

"Oh, no, you don't have to. I still have some left over from last week. See?" Hilda held out a half-full white paper bag stained with butter. "I'll just eat this. I won't eat very much." Pointing her eyes down, she quickly popped a single soft, stale kernel in her mouth and rolled it around between her front teeth.

"Nonsense. I'll get you some hot. I'LL BE BACK IN A MINUTE."

Back outside, long strips of cold winter sunlight striped the corridor floor across from open doorways all along the floor-wax scented hall. Up and down the wide corridor the nurse looked at a silent procession of vinyl-seated wheelchairs, nestled up unmoving against the obligatory wooden handrail on both walls. The bundled white wrinkle-heaps in the chairs never looked at each other, never spoke. The nurse could hear the dull squelching of her own soft soles as she trod the center path the wheelchairs left. 'They're all waiting,' she thought. 'They're just... waiting...' Behind one open door, a bony old man sat on the edge of his bed, blankly fingering a raspy accordion. A second man, with thick trifocals and orange polyester pants up to his chest, gazed into a mirror and scraped an electric razor across his trembling chin. A sunken hulk farther down the hall crouched in front of his MTV. In the nearly deserted lounge at the corridor's end, the girl behind the popcorn machine grinned like a lunatic through bright red lipstick and thrust two steaming, white bags at the nurse. "Don't they want any popcorn today?" she asked, pointing at the chairs lined up in the hall. Somewhere in the lounge, an isolated voice groaned.

On her way back to Hilda's room, the nurse stopped in the doorway of one open room and gazed inside. On the opposite wall, the mustard curtains were drawn shut, and mustard light filtered in over a thick sheeted lump on the far bed. A two-man transport ambulance team had wheeled a white-sheeted gurney into the room, and the men in white coats struggled now to work around the gurney. One of the two, the rosy-faced blond, leaning over the head of the sheeted lump's bed, was apparently new to the team. The nurse already knew the ambulance's driver, though a gangling young man with limp brown hair below his shoulders, who would discourse endlessly about Ovid for a cup of the nurses' coffee. When he saw the observer in the doorway, he smiled a little before turning back to the bulk lying on the bed.

The nurse watched as the ambulance driver grasped the feet of the draped mass, tucking the sheets under his fingers so as not to slide off. His partner eased his hand under the figure's neck and clutched the opposite shoulder, as though to support its back. At a subdued "Okay," the two men lifted together; the body bowed between them like a sardonic sheeted smile as, with uneven, mincing steps, they maneuvered their load over to the waiting

gurney. As they laid the covered figure down, the gurney shifted forward a few inches, metal wheels rattling on the hard floor, and one blue hand rolled out from under the sheet. The blond gingerly tucked the rebellious claw back where it belonged. It wasn't until the gurney was nearly out of the darkened room that the nurse first saw the deceased's roommate huddled in a corner alone, looking on with lost, bewildered grey eyes.

"You know, we haven't made a live run down here in a little while now," observed the ambulance driver in the corridor. He paused while the blond pushed a wandering wheelchair over to the wooden handrail on the side. Behind the nurses' station, a blue-clad nurse carefully wiped "Cheever" off the blackboard directory on the wall. The driver glanced down at the popcorn bags the nurse still clutched. "No offense, but I really hate this place."

* * *

"EVENING, HILDA."

Mrs. Lessing's bare hip rolled deep in her stained sheets, and the nurse saw Hilda's frizzled brown head shaking slowly back and forth in the dim shadows beyond. Hilda's chair was stuffed back into its usual corner, and Hilda methodically folded and re-folded the crocheted lap quilt over the vinyl seat. The nurse shifted her heavy overcoat from one arm to the other.

"I'VE GOT TO GO NOW, HILDA. ANOTHER NURSE WILL PUT YOU TO BED A LITTLE LATER."

The old woman turned her questioning face toward the nurse and blinked melted watercolor eyes behind her thick glasses. "Have we been introduced?"

"Sure we have." The stifling heat inside the room made the nurse's head throb. "I brought you your popcorn today — remember? POPCORN—"

"Popcorn?" Hilda looked baffled.

"Sure." The nurse paused. "Are you all right, Grandma?"

"Grandma? But I don't have any children."

"Sure you do. Look, there are PICTURES —" The photo collage was missing from its usual nightstand perch. "Do you want some oxygen?"

Switz City Anthology: The Plumber and the Painter

by
Tori Kensington

I
And O, the Road goes ever on.
This Bilbo sang to the Plumber.
The Plumber was a girl with big hands
  and big feet.
Once she had tried to give up plumbing
  and had served old ladies wearing
Mercedes Benzedrine
Over their mink coats:
Hills, like dunn elephants
contrived of gourmet chicken salad
Over roast.
But since she was only a plumber
— and, therefore,
a plumbing image —
She put on Thomas Crapper's
Wax wedding ring
  that welded her to craft
And dedicated her life
to the Municiple Building Code
of Plumbing.
And she grew deaf ears of Chicken Salad
With extra amounts of Mayonnaise.
So much Chicken Salad,
With so much Mayonnaise
That the old ladies couldn't
  eat it fast enough to
  keep out the
Ptomaines.
The Plumber smiled,
For she knew about the Ptomaines,
And the old ladies.
They wore the same perfume
As the faggots on Pennsylvania Street
In 1975.
And later she saw them hitch hiking
On the Road to Switz City
But she never stopped
  to pick them up.
She knew where Switz City was,
But she never Stopped.
She had driven past Switz City;
But never through it.
And that made all the difference.

II

She had been successful at getting the car started again. She was unusually mechanically inclined. Automobiles seldom proved mysterious to her but her specialty was plumbing. But years of skillful plumbing had given her big calloused hands and big feet. She felt that she was too tall, and even this she had blamed on plumbing. "Just like Pinocchio," she thought. "Use some that you shouldn't and it'll just get bigger on you."

She called the Painter. "Let's go," she said. "It's time to get out of here, and on the Road."

"Okay," said the Painter.

They drove down the highway, and the real estate passed under them. They drove south like going to the principal's office for a paddling for not doing her homework. The Road unfolded.

Black asphalt,
Flat and fresh,
With yellow lines of mascara,
Cosmetically covered the chuckholes of long ago.
The Plumber knew them well,
But the Painter didn't seem to notice.

They drove on State Road 67.
They passed at least
67 Billboards
displaying
67 Lies
on which
67 Fortunes
were Made
off of People
Who could not go home anymore.

And the two travelers on 67
Equaled 69
Two opposites
Yet alike
One leaden, one hunting;
One driving, one riding;
One hardboiled, one over-easy;
Both traveling.
O, what a long Road it is to Switz City:
To find out the dream
Is not in the Road,
Or in driving,
But in your eye.
And by keeping
Your eye on the Road,
You can drive to Switz City,

Where grandmothers
Will stand on the back porches
Of their country homes
And watch,
as satellite tv dishes
bloom like daffodils
to put us
  in
  touch;
to bring us
  closer
  to—
  get—
  her.
And to pick up MTV
Among the soybeans.

III
The two travelers continued on their way to Switz City.
On the right was Observatory Road which led up a hill to the Goeth-Link Observatory. It was built in the twenties, and now little used.
  "It was bound to be here," said the Plumber.
  "Let's have a look," said the Painter.
  They turned off and drove up the hill
To the Citadel
  of those
Who would watch
  the stars
All night long.

They would sit
  behind great instruments.
And the light
      of stars
            and the planets
                  would fall
                        on their retinas
only.

And then they would name them.
Name them all;
With small hand whittled pencils
They had manically kept
To write in their notebooks;
To name the name
they had named them,
And number the number
they'd numbered them —

Like stray cats or dogs
or lost bicycles
Getting a registration
and putting them all
IN ORDER
as if the chaos of the universe
Wasn't orderly enough
For mankind
And the watchers would say,
To their wives and other lovers,
"There.... right up there.... that star right there.... that's MY star.... I named it.... that's the one right there.... C7861FGH/871KCH-01.... that's it, tha's the name of it .... tha's my star ....

But there were no watchers there now. They had all gone home and so there was nobody to help the Plumber and the Painter.

But there it stood. Ready.

"I wonder where the watchers are?" said the Painter.

"I'm afraid they've used up all the stars," said the Plumber. "Nobody wants to name something that's been named already."

"I can see their point," said the Painter.

They stood and looked at the observatory.

But it didn't look back. Its great eye was closed with a mote of obsolescence. The building stood there, waiting, like a ship in dry dock, or in mothballs, ready to sail the skys of united.

"United we stand," thought the Painter.

"Divided we don't show a profit," thought the Plumber.

And since there were no stars left to profit with, the observatory mothed in its mothballs and would not let them in.

"Let's get out of here," said the Plumber.

"Okay," said the Painter.

IV

The Plumber and the Painter drove back to the highway that led south to Switz City. The Plumber continued to drive. She had learned plumbing in the south. Now she had big hands and big feet and was too tall. "Plumbing," she thought. "That's what did it. And now I've got to drive to the goddamned south.

She drove.

It seemed to her that she drove a lot. Driving and plumbing, that's what did it to her. That's what.

Outside of Worthington they turned onto State Road 57. They had turned the wrong way.

"It was bound to happen," said the Plumber.

"Oh," said the Painter.

"We'll turn around by the Bridge."

When they reached the Bridge, they left the car on the northern shore, and walked out over the water. They stood in the middle of the Bridge and looked south. The Plumber did not like the south. There was nothing down there that did not leak. All of the houses were full of bad pipes that seemed to run the wrong way.

"It'll never work, I told 'em," said the Plumber. "It ain't according to code."

They stood in the middle of the Bridge and the Road ran to the leaky south and it ran to the dry north.

The Painter wondered what the south was like. "Are there houses to paint down there?" he asked.

"Yeah, but they ain't built to code neither. Your paint won't do 'em any good. It won't hold 'em together.

The water flowed under the Bridge. And in the water they saw their shadows dance like trolls who live under bridges. And the shadow-trolls reminded them that the Bridge was not theirs and they could not stay there without paying. And since the Road ahead went away from Sitz City they turned around and headed back to the car.

"Let's get out of here," she said.

"Okay."

V

And so they found the road to Switz City.

O, it is a long road to Switz City.

"There must be a place for us," said the Painter.

"No there's not," said the Plumber.

There wasn't. It was all a lie. A hoax. A story.

The Painter knew better. He knew that colors were good, that he could make things clean and fresh and new again. All you needed was a gallon of Sear's Latex indoor/outdoor.

But the Plumber didn't understand latex novelty.

"Pipes leak or they don't. It's either to code or it ain't. You can lie with paint. You can't lie with plumbing.

The Painter sighed.

The Road stretched forward ahead. And the Painter thought how the Road was like his life. Coming. Being. Going. He saw. He was. He remembered.

He closed his eyes and laid back in his seat. "Soon we'll be somewhere. Soon this life and trip will take on some profound meaning," he thought. He looked at the Plumber. She was sniffing some Poppers.

"They're fun," she said, "just part of the trip."

He thanked her much for that.

The car moved.
The Road moved.
The Earth moved.
Every thing was moving around them.
"Actually we're doing the moving. They're just standing still," thought the Painter.
"And that makes all the difference," thought the Plumber.

VI
The wheels turned.
The Earth turned.
The observatory turned.

Their grandfathers had turned.
And their fathers had turned.
Now it was their turn.
Some will turn onto State Road 67,
but others will turn on State Road 57
(Outside of Worthington)
They will all go to Switz City.
"They're bound to," said the Plumber.
"And when they get there, they'll say:
'Let's get out of here'
They'll do it 'cause it's according to Code."

—Coda—
Soon they came to the hitchhikers. They were all lined up along the side of the Road. They all stuck out their thumbs and smiled. In the group were some bridge trolls, Drs. Goethe and Link, some building code inspectors, and several unemployed star watchers with full notebooks.
The Plumber pulled over and the Painter rolled down the window. The group of hitchhikers ran up and smiled into the window.
"We all want to go with you," they said.
"Where are you headed?" asked the Painter. "Switz City?"
"Yes, yes! Give us a ride! Give us a ride to Switz City!"
The painter looked over at the Plumber.
"Let's get out of here," he said, and he rolled up the window as they sped off.

Demain, dès l'aube

by Victor Hugo

Demain, dès l'aube, à l'heure où blanchit la campagne,
Je partirai. Vois-tu, je sais que tu m'attends.
J'irai par la forêt, j'irai par la montagne,
Je ne puis demeurer loin de toi plus longtemps.

Je marcherai les yeux fixés sur mes pensées,
Sans rien voir au dehors, sans entendre aucun bruit,
Seul, inconnu, le dos courbé, les mains croisées,
Triste, et le jour pour moi sera comme la nuit.

Je ne regarderai ni l'or du soir qui tombe,
Ni les voiles au loin descendant vers Harfleur,
Et quand j'arriverai, je mettrai sur ta tombe
Un bouquet de houx vert et de bruyère en fleur.

Tomorrow, At Dawn

Translated by Debbie Edwards

Tomorrow, at dawn, when the hour whitens the countryside,
I will leave. You see, I know that you are waiting for me.
I will go through the forest, I will go around the mountain,
I cannot stay far from you for very long.

I will walk, my eyes fixed on my thoughts,
Without seeing anything around me, without hearing a sound,
Alone, a stranger, shoulders stooped, hands crossed,
Sad, and day for me will be like night.

I will not see the gold of the evening,
Nor the far-away sails coming home to Harfleur,
And when I arrive, I will put on your grave
A bouquet of green holly and heather in bloom.

Poems

by Sarah Hill

The custom is to bring the fire in
on the first cold day in autumn, this has more
of the late season in it than even the tree
of Christmas. Two adults lug the stove in, fasten
the pipe, the children scramble for the first sticks
to burn. The iron has been freshly blacked, no ash
remains from last year's fire; it is a new stove
to all believing eyes. The loose nest of twigs,
just placed in the belly of the stove, catches easily
with the offering of flame, snaps and spits;
with the closing of the black door, it sucks the air,
and through the window all eyes watch
the flat sky above the chimney go wavy with heat.
The first burst of cold wants little fire
to dry the house, and while all the watchers
are driven out to breathe the damp wind,
the cool their faces, the first fire brings them back
to heat already warm hands, to redden brown faces,
to feel the wet summer air bake dry and be winter.

A full hour before dawn the light begins,
thin and gray in a cold room, words,
that later will hang invisible in warmth,
solidify before our mouths, we can see
what we have spoken, however quietly.
But there is need, this time of day, for heat,
for the slow softening of air with fire;
we turn our faces to the wood we have laid,
listening, silent, for the crack of kindling
that tells us it has caught up the glow
of the fading coals, and as we shed night clothes,
putting on, instead, our layers of day covering,
we speak of coffee and eggs, warm bread, oranges,
neither listening, both content to prattle, backing
away from the fire, our words as unacknowledged,
now, as the yellow air into which they fade.

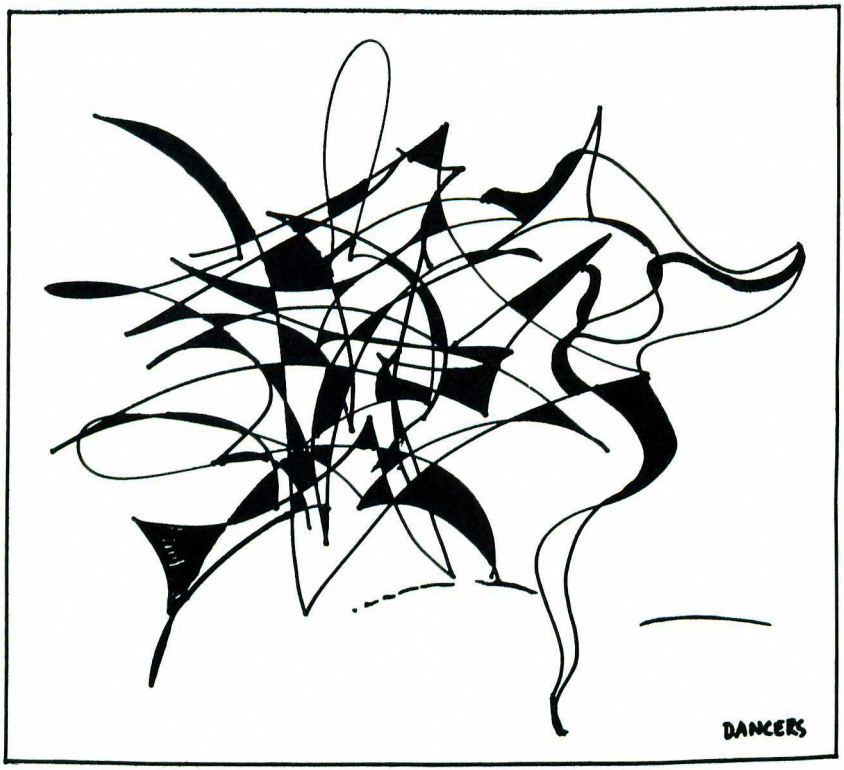
Here in April, could the sun come up
any more yellow, could she wake to find
any more light flung across a morning room—
finding suddenly the day up before her,
she brings to it, hour by hour, on this first day,
white, unwindings, unfoldings, of linen,
the bed, the windows, hung with sudden white,
the crystal, that had gleamed deep with fire, shatters
the broad blank to a thousand small angles, she smells
the flowers of berries that creep up the brick
of the walls and is out, ready to take the sun
onto her winter skin, to feel the bleaching light
turn dusky on her shoulders; changed on her arms
to deeper and deeper dark, the light will go down,
but for this day of white, she will give over
her skin to the widening white disc, she will take it
for months ahead on her face, on her scorched brow,
she will hold it, she would hold it here.

On the horns of the white bull they measure
the seasons, the ages of young cattle fattening
in the fields of summer, the barns of winter.
Hauled from distant land, prized for a fine head,
a perfect heavy whiteness, he is penned
near the barn for all to see, to speak of, to feed
from silent raised hands. They count other stock
as it stands to his age, the curved horns,
the broad flat forehead speaks a kind of wisdom
to their ears. He is a bull now in prime flesh,
wide with a straight back, tall, but now too
young stock comes ready for fresh blood,
a new bull, nappy with calf's hair, a downy
perfect white. By the horns the old bull
is taken to slaughter, here in the same pen
the hot blood stains the thick coat, bubbles
from the gash in the woolly throat, soaking
the black ground of early winter that will send back
green and greener shoots in spring, tall grass
for the summer calf to feed on, and grow.

The snakes of summer spring up in the house,
in the fields, the snakes avoiding the sun, the green
grass snakes, the black rat swallowers, and we
catch them up by the tail, fearless of the flashing
red tongue, laughing when the children squeal and run
from the dangling snake arching its back, stretching
itself out on the air. In the house the line of green
will lie out on the cool tile of the kitchen, the woman
will take it up on the end of a broom, glad to have
one there who feeds on sleek rodents, and set it out.
We are too far North for poison snakes, yet some are here
who shun the thick coils, the brilliant scales, our open
cellar doors; some would have us bring axes,
that we keep for wood, down on the smooth skins,
would smile at the bleeding body, the broken line.
But we like our summer doors open, the green wind
of June we like as well as the good hunter we meet
in the gardens, the snake shedding old coarse skins
like the blankets of a winter we have moved beyond.

The sun at noon has us believing, thinking
this work can go on until we are through,
the midsummer day will shine and clearly shine
until the great cycle of labor is complete.
The rake that rolled through the grass days ago
seems to have stopped only earlier this morning,
though it stands cold and dry in a corner
we can see, if we should lift our eyes to look.
When we feel a breeze, or the still air begins
to cool, we push the work, wanting our harvest
now, wanting still to know we can finish today.
It is not until the dark has come down
so far that our hands disappear from our sight
that we begin to feel our shoulders, our legs,
that we turn our machines off for the night,
take up our small lights, and aching, stumble
back through the still woods, saying it is enough.

It was on the wall one evening,
in the house that had stood silent
all day, hanging on an empty wall.
A small house, standing on a dry farm
now contained an ocean, an ocean she
had never seen in the blue of her mother's
paint. No note, no letter was there,
only the slashes of blue, deep below
and lighter for the sky. Had the strokes
of the painter not been so familiar,
had she not recognized the turn of the light,
it might have been a mystery to her,
the strange splash of water, the warm sky,
but she knew what she saw as though she had
seen it before, and, stooping close, found all
that was needed, a small name, and the bright ocean.


DANCERS

A Story

by Jessica Smith

I can only remember my mother's face when I look at her picture. I pick up the frame and see her smiling through the cracked glass. Why I never replaced the glass? I don't know. Perhaps because she had bought the picture frame. Behind her picture is one of my father and mother together.

My father is dead. At least he is to me. He is still alive legally, somewhere. I don't know. I was old enough to remember, yet young enough to be swept away from his presence forever.

My mother and I had gone to the grocery store. Not an important trip for most people. For my mother, it was her outing of the week. We only had one car which my father drove to work. It often had problems, and I would hear my father's cursing, loud and violent. My mother would hold me tight and try to cover my ears from his wrath.

A neighbor took my mother to the grocery store, and she was late in picking us up. When we got to the store the neighbor went her separate way. My mother, who usually was quiet, laughed and tickled me. I smiled and squirmed and tried to get away. By the meat counter she impulsively swept me up in her arms. She looked at me closely and said, "I love you, my little baby. Do you know that?"

"I love you too, Mommy," I said. I wiggled out of her arms and pressed my face against the glass to watch the meat man help my mother. I helped her gather jars and bottles and boxes into our car. We met our neighbor at the check-out line.

It was later than usual when we arrived home. My mother looked a little worried as she hurriedly put groceries away. She quietly asked me to go into the family room and out of her way. I could hear the clink of dishes as she hurriedly prepared a dinner. I could feel the tenseness. My father did not like his dinner to be late.

She was still working over the stove when he came in. I was carrying dishes that my mother had quickly pulled from the cupboard. I stopped in the middle of the kitchen and stared at the floor.

"What is this?" he demanded. "I work hard to put food in this family's mouth and I can't even come home to a dinner myself." He continued on while I stood rooted to my spot. My mother was working quickly, her back turned to him. Outraged, he grabbed her arm and spun her around. She reached backward to gain her balance and her hand fell on a hot burner. She screamed and jumped. I screamed and ran from the room. I had seen my father in his rages before but I had always tried to run when he started beating my mother. I was helpless to her pain and fear, and his rage. I clattered the dishes on the table and ran to my room. Shutting the door, I was free to cry out my fear, and I sobbed while I heard the yells and crashes. I heard only his voice, and after awhile I couldn't hear her cries. I realized later, as an adult, her only revenge was to remain silent so his blows would not bring a response.

After an hour or so I ventured from my room, my eyes swollen and my cheeks stained where the tears had made lines in the dirt and smudges. I slowly tiptoed out into the living room. I could hear sobs but they weren't my mother's. I stood in the doorway and watched my father crying over my mother's body, crumpled and bloody on the kitchen floor.

My wedding was small but it was what I wanted. I knew I would be happy, forever. My grandmother, my mother's mother, had tears in her eyes as she wished me well. She had raised me since I was six and I was closer to her than anyone else. I was brought to her, small and scared, speechless of the pain I had seen and felt. She helped me speak, she helped me to love someone again. Now I was in love and leaving her for my own new life.

I had gone to high school with my husband. We had met our junior year and had dated steadily ever since. He was the first man I dated. I was afraid of men, but he seemed to treat me well. I thought I was out of line a couple times, and he let me know it. But I thought it was OK.

We started having problems after I got pregnant. We had neglected to get maternity coverage on our insurance, and the doctor bills were high. Suddenly we were scraping for every penny. We sold our car for something older. We made a little money on the deal, but my husband was in a constant battle to keep the car running. His cursing would bring pains in the pit of my stomach. I could feel the baby kicking. Sometimes it seemed I could hear it crying.

I started having nightmares. My husband would be awakened when I cried out. He shook me until I woke up. I would lie in bed, shivering with sweat and staring at the growing mound on my body. My husband would soon be asleep again, and I would listen to his snoring until the darkness of night faded.

"You look like hell," he told me one morning as I fixed him breakfast.

I told him it was my nightmares. He wordlessly pulled his plate closer to him and turned on the small TV he had set up on the table. He watched the cartoons. I listened to him laugh at the same cartoons over and over again while I scrubbed the morning dishes, my back turned to him.

I realized one day that he no longer touched me unless it was to wake me up. I lay in bed and noticed he kept a gap of space between us. I reached out with my foot to stroke his calf and he withdrew, mumbling. He watched TV more and more. He would remark on how pretty the newscaster looked each night. He never used to watch the news.

In the middle of the night I began having labor pains. I was afraid to wake him, his sleep was so important on weeknights, he said. I lay in the dark, my knees drawn up to my swollen belly, gritting my teeth and gently rocking. I thought of my grandmother. I tried to think of my grandfather. He had died when my mother was only eight. My grandmother never spoke of him. I only knew of him from some dusty albums I had found when playing in her attic as a child. I wondered what my grandfather did when Grandmother went into labor. I tried to

imagine him excited and running around senselessly while my grandmother packed an overnight bag. All I knew about my mother's birth was that it was in the hospital. I thought of my mother, probably all bones and dust by now, and the thought seemed to bring on an intense contraction. I sat up on the edge of the bed and rocked myself from side to side, holding my arms tightly across my ribs. My husband mumbled and began snoring again. I looked at him and thought of our senior prom. He had convinced me that sex was the thing to do. We left the prom early and parked in a remote place. He grappled with my clothes and then my body, clumsily trying to find his way on strange territory. My grandmother was not up when I got home, my hair and dress rumpled, but it seemed the next morning she looked at me differently. I asked her if she had a prom she went to. She looked away and quietly said, "yes."

I got up and went out to the kitchen. I sat in the dark and stared at the vacant TV screen. I stared so long I began to see images and then pictures in the screen. I cupped my chin in my hands and sleepily watched pictures I hadn't seen for years. My mother waved at me and I dreamily waved back. She seemed so happy. Her dress flowed around her slender body, and a breeze ruffled her hair so she had to brush it from her eyes. She walked in a field of flowers. She looked so beautiful. Then, somehow, my father entered the picture. He strode across the screen and grabbed my mother's arm. She spun around, alarmed, and screamed. Screams.

My husband ran into the kitchen, naked except for the gun in his hand. His heavy footfalls startled me into reality. "I'm sorry," I said. "I'm in labor. It hurts."

"Well, it's time to go to the hospital then," he said matter-of-factly. "Better get a bag packed."

He stepped aside to let me pass. I noticed I could not have reached him, even if I had stretched my arm out fully.

"Please call Grandma. I need her."

"Don't be silly," he said. "You're a big girl."

I didn't argue. I had never been able to argue, even with my grandmother. Silence was my only weapon, and I used it all the way to the hospital. I lay my hand in the middle of the seat, once, to see if he would take it and comfort me, but he kept both hands on the wheel and his eyes on the road. I withdrew my hand when another contraction caused me to grab my sides for strength.

At the hospital I realized I hadn't been touched for over a week. Not since I had visited my grandmother on a Saturday. She gave me a kiss and a hug. "Don't forget your prayers, honey," she said. The nurses touched me on my arms and body. One took my hand and squeezed it as I was wheeled into the delivery room. I turned around to see my husband, but he was nowhere in sight.

I watched with horror and fascination as my child slowly burst into the world. "It's a girl," someone whispered. I wondered how they could tell anything from the bloody, brown, wrinkled thing that had come from my body.

"Where's my husband?" I asked. One of the nurses sheepishly

looked at me and said, "He said to tell you he had to go to work."

I love my baby. I want to shelter her from all the harm and pain that has happened to me. I want her to have everything in the world and know there can only be happiness for her. My husband is jealous of my baby, and I hate him for that.

He started touching me again a couple months after the baby was born. His touch, though, seemed cold. I had read somewhere that women could be raped by their husbands. I wondered if that was what was happening to me. I remember one night when he began touching me, roughly grabbing me. I cried out in pain, suddenly, a response to his roughness. The baby began crying. I instinctively sat up to go to comfort her. He pushed me down and pinned my shoulders with his hands. I looked away as he proceeded methodically, seeming to become more excited as the baby's wails became louder.

During the day when he was away the baby seemed happy. She gurbled with content. She seemed to be making normal progress—putting things in her mouth at the right age, walking at the right age. I delighted in her progress. I hugged her and kissed her. I remembered how my mother loved me, and I loved my baby even more. I would not let my baby suffer the way I did.

When my husband came home the baby became quiet and sullen. She often cried and when I ran to comfort her my husband would grab my arm and pull me away. Once I yanked my arm from him. His eyes flashed for a moment and he slapped me. The baby stopped crying and stared, an object poised at the corner of her mouth. I fled from the room. I saw the red mark on my cheek as I sat on the bed and stared at my reflection. I heard the TV playing loudly in the kitchen.

Several days later I told him I wanted to visit my grandmother the following Saturday. I hadn't seen her for three weeks and she lived only 15 miles away. My husband told me to find a ride. Later that night I told him I had secured a ride and he hit me. I looked at him for an explanation to his reaction. He turned and walked from the room. I heard the outside door slam and the car engine start. I sat on the edge of the bed, shredding a Kleenex until my little girl woke me from my trance. She put her chubby little hands on my knees and looked into my face. I could see in her eyes that she knew the world was not a wonderful place. Tears fell down my cheeks and dropped onto her silky golden hair. I smoothed the tears into her hair and rocked her gently. "I love you, my little baby. Do you know that?" I asked.

She sleepily mumbled, "I love you too, Mommy." I carried her to her bed. I sat on the edge of the bed and stroked her hair until her breathing was regular. I looked around the room at the teddy bears evenly lined up on the wallpaper as if they were ready to go somewhere.

Across the Check-out Counter

by Darsi Bohr

The two women looked warily at each other over two weeks' worth of groceries. On one side of the grocery-laden conveyer belt, a young housewife stood with her purse in one hand and a fistfull of coupons in the other. Her year-old daughter sat in the front of the grocery cart ecstatically chewing on the cool metal handle. Holly's teeth were coming in, and the cool metal felt good on her gums. Her mother's continual concern about what kinds of germs from millions of anonymous sweaty hands resided on the handle had repeatedly removed Holly's mouth from the metal. But now the housewife wasn't looking at her daughter; she concentrated on the cashier.

The cashier was shorter, fatter, and older than the housewife. Her orange polyester uniform jacket with yellow plaid trim didn't correspond with anything else she had on. But all of this was normal; these two women had often met in exactly these same circumstances. Only their faces had changed. Three months ago these women had talked about world events, the weather, new cleaning products and Holly (especially Holly) all while the cashier rang up the groceries, and the housewife hoped she had enough money in her purse to pay for them.

The cashier knew all about Holly's penchant for opening the potato chip bag. She knew what Holly was allergic to and when she would get hay fever.

The housewife knew that the cashier worked six days a week, four mornings and two evenings. She knew the cashier had two teenage sons who played high school football. She knew the cashier was divorced and unhappy about it.

All this information passed back and forth as friendly contact while the housewife and cashier made sure everything was rung up correctly.

The housewife thought the cashier's voice was too loud and her manners too gruff. But she admired her strength and helpful, friendly no-nonsense approach to her job, and, the housewife supposed, her life.

The cashier thought the housewife spent too much time wondering what to fix her husband for dinner, and what precise stage of development Holly was experiencing. The cashier also thought the housewife's abundant coupon clipping was fanatical. All that work just to save four dollars. She could have just left something off her shopping list. However, the cashier admired the housewife's innocent enthusiasm. She was the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval woman living and breathing in the real world.

The two women never saw each other outside of the grocery, but the housewife always went to that cashier's aisle. And the cashier always told her about the specials.

But three months ago Kroger's employees, including the cashier, went on strike. The Kroger employees — butchers, cashiers and stockboys — all stood in the parking lot carrying signs emblazoned with their union number. The housewife walked by and thought how ordinary they looked without their orange jackets. She walked with Holly on one hip, dragging her shopping basket behind her. As she walked past Kroger towards the double coupon sale at Lowells, the strikers cheered and applauded and yelled their thanks for not shopping at Krogers.

The housewife was startled, embarrassed and then pleased by this boisterous display. She patted herself on the back for helping the underdog.

That evening while washing the dinner dishes, the housewife listened to the local news on her kitchen radio.

The news announcer said, "Today is the third day in the Kroger workers' strike. A spokesman for Local 462 said that contract talks were stagnant."

She hated the news reports that assumed you knew all that had gone on before. As if you spent your life listening to their broadcasts. Why were they striking? Was Kroger taking advantage of their workers? Or did the workers just want more money? The housewife stood holding her dishcloth while nebulous memories of a sociology class labor union debate drifted past her eyes. Then her husband called from the living room, "Come see this unbelievable blooper Sax made at second base. They're going to show it on instant replay." The housewife shook her head and hurried to the living room wearing her baseball face.

For the next couple of weeks the housewife took Holly to play in the park and then on past Kroger to Lowells farther down the street. Each time the strikers would cheer as she walked past. She never looked at them or smiled but she felt she was doing a good deed.

Then her husband Mike decided he wanted boysenberry jam on toast for breakfast. Lowells did not carry boysenberry jam. None of the local groceries carried boysenberry jam. The only boysenberry jam she had ever seen was Knotts Berry Farm boysenberry jam, $1.39 right between the Jiff peanut butter and the Welches grape jelly on aisle six at Kroger.

There were a million Kroger stores around. She would cross a different picket line. Mike needed the car on weekdays to make sales calls. She'd have to wait for the weekend. Holly had a hay fever attack that weekend so the housewife never left the house. She sent Mike out for groceries. She didn't ask where he went. He did not get the boysenberry jam.

The next Wednesday on finding no jam, Mike left for work without breakfast. She felt guilty. Often Mike was so rushed, he went without lunch. Surely she was adult enough to get him his stupid jam.

That afternoon she and Holly walked into Krogers. The strikers booed and jeered. She looked at them just in time to see the cashier yell traitor.

Inside Krogers it was dark. Darker than just being out of the bright

summer sun. Krogers must have been using this time to save on electricity. It was eerie. She was the only customer in the store. Before, no matter what time of the day, there was always someone turning out of an aisle as she was turning in it.

There wasn't much bread on the shelves and the milk had expired dates on their bright red cartons. But the boysenberry jam was there. She picked up two jars and walked to the checkout aisle. A strange man in a shirt and tie rang up her jam. Who was he? He didn't have the bug-eyed smile of the manager, whose picture was hanging on the office door. He must be some Kroger bureaucrat sent to man the front lines while others negotiated with the strikers.

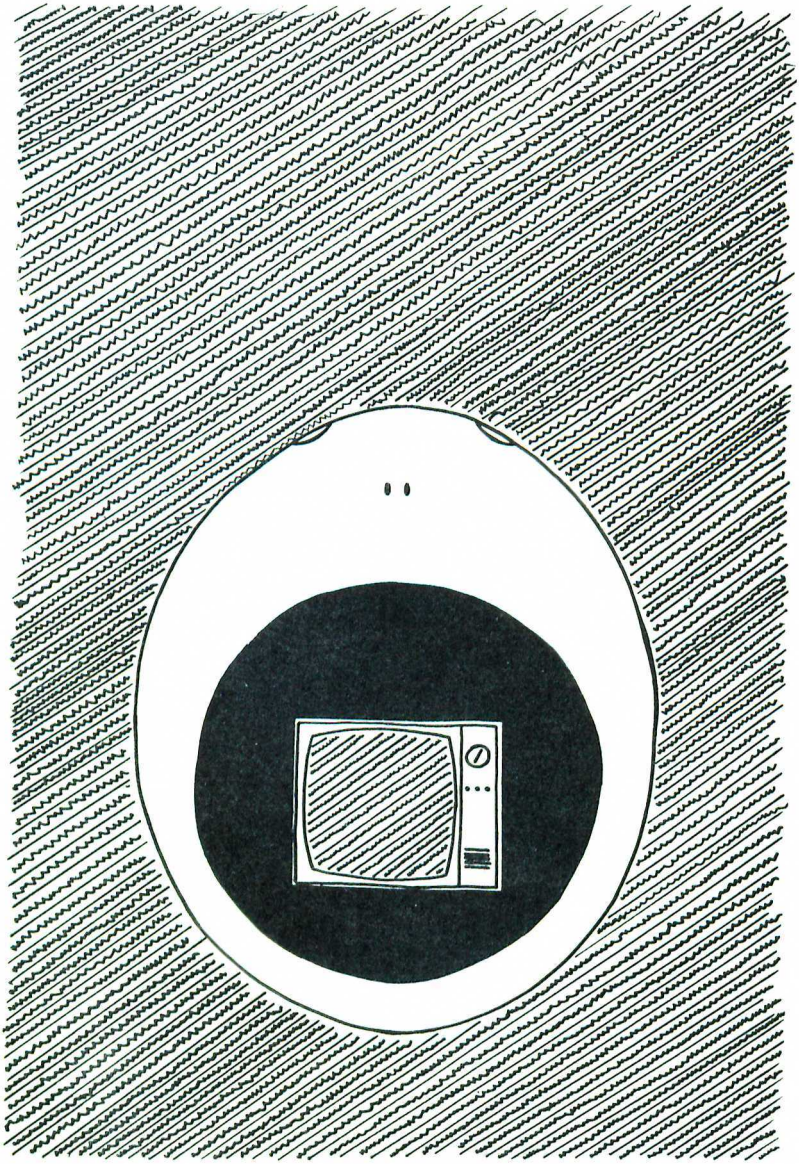
When the housewife went out into the shining glare, the strikers started to boo again. The box boy who always helped her load her shopping cart yelled, "Thank you for not shopping at Krogers!" As she walked home the housewife was tired, and Holly felt heavy in her arms.

The next two months Mike ate boysenberry jam like a jam junkie. Every day he loaded three pieces of toast with enough jam to strangle a cat. The housewife, glad that he was getting something he liked to eat, did not mention the strikers. She was a wife and mother; she could handle anything. However she tried to buy the beloved jam at a different store on weekends. But often she would have to brave the picket lines and the cashier and go to her Krogers.

After three months the strike was over. An agreement had been reached. What it was all about the housewife did not know. The newsman had continued to talk as if everyone had been at the bargaining tables so he didn't bore them with details.

The housewife took Holly to the brightly lit and fully occupied Krogers. Holly lost her teething ring somewhere between the produce and the freezer section. The housewife pried Holly's mouth off the grocery cart handle and picked out a new pink chew bear.

The housewife and cashier looked at each other across the groceries. The cashier smiled a little, and the housewife beamed back. Neither one spoke. As the housewife walked toward the exit she counted her change. She was short three dollars.



Magna Vox Organum

by Rhet Lickliter

We were rusting,
Like the hollow shell of a burnt out chevrolet.
We were falling like flies,
Spiraling to the floor,
Screwed into the ground
With every turn of the earth
Drawing us closer
To our knees,
Giving up gyrations
To gravity.
We were waltzing
While our springs wound down
Like little toys on tabletops.
We were records playing
As the turntables were unplugged,
And Lene Lovich
Became a dying Billy Eckstein.
We were sucked into the picture tube
As the set went off
Becoming blurred
Colours and shapes
Beginning to shrink
Into a monochrome circle of light
Inside the 21 inch diagonal.
And the circle of light
Grew to a dot,
Into a point
We vanished
Within a simulated wood finish
Filled with solid state micro circuitry,
Only able to return,
With the pointing of control,
And the pressure of a thumb.

Why I Never Wrote You A Poem

For Megan

by Tori Kensington

And as I polish
my glass eye
to contemplate
the navel of
the universe
I see my mythology circumscribed;
Refracted,
Condenced,
by an f/4 mirage of
dust on face.

I
(not pushed
but moved
by camel's hair brush)
at least
look in
and see
magik mirror montage:
Nadir, Zenith
Altitude,
Azimuth.
Decline to right
Ascensions;
Reflect on left
overs there.

Electromagnetic pulses
send waves
of retina
illumination
to tingle
my synaptic syntax.

The bare cross
of tomfoolery
and arena lit
public schools
have aberrations
chromatic.
Electric lovers
only have eyes
for Blue Moon you.

Vincent Lopez can't play it for you.
And nadir can eye.

An Evening At Home

by John Douglas Boles

It was Friday night and Joe Temple was bored. He sat in the living room of his small four-room house watching television with the lights off. The lighting in the room flashed from bright to dull as the scenes on the 19-inch black and white changed. To those passing outside this caused the house to have a devilish, almost possessed aura. Joe sat watching from his reclining chair in the middle of the room. The chair was strategically placed so he could see into the kitchen and his bedroom without moving. He'd been in the chair all evening unless he had to go to the bathroom or go to the kitchen and get another beer. The cardboard table next to him was covered with empty beer cans, some with cigarette ashes and butts in them, two crushed Winston packs, one Winston pack with six cigarettes left, a Snickers, and a T.V. Guide. Joe glanced at his clock radio in his bedroom. It was 11:11. He had to do something now. He was bored.

Joe sat up and flipped the chair into the upright position. He reached over the right arm of the chair, snatched up his tennis shoes, and put them on. They were only two days old. The T.V. flashed and the room was bright. Joe noticed that the pile of Mike Sells potato chips he'd spilled yesterday had attracted a group of ants. They were hustling to carry crumbs to a hole in the wall. It reminded Joe of when he worked on the loading docks and how they all hurried to get their work done so they could take a break. He noticed a black smudge that resemble a smashed ant on the toe of his right shoe.

"Can't have that on the new shoes," he said as he scooped it up with his index finger and stuck it in his mouth. It felt crunchy and stale. There was no taste, however, except that of the sweat on his hands. Joe stood up, pulled his comb out of his pocket, ran it through his hair, and zipped up his fly. It had been down since his last trip to the bathroom. He was going out.

Joe opened the door and walked out onto the porch. The fresh air was enough to make his head dizzy. It was too clean. He was used to the cigarette-smoke-filled air that he lived in. The walk to the car was the most exercise Joe had gotten since taking a shower and calling in sick to work earlier in the morning.

The door to his '78 Omega fought to stay closed as Joe pulled on the handle. The rusting hinges rasped in objection to being opened. Joe slid down into the driver's seat and closed the door with a sigh of relief. He had made it. The air smelled like stale cigarettes in the car and this too was a relief.

Suddenly he realized that he had no idea where his boredom was taking him. When he was little, his dad would have asked him if he was 'aimless.' He would have to answer 'yes.' But he really didn't care at this point. He was going out. He started the car and pulled away.

Inside the house, the T.V. reverted the light to dullness.

While You Were Out . . .

It was just about time for the sun to come up when Joe was on his way home. His heart was pounding and his mind was playing tricks on him. He knew what he had done was wrong so why did his mind have to punish him by playing tricks? It wasn't fair; he knew it was wrong. Besides, he would never get caught. He thought about all the candy he had stolen from the drugstore before grade school and how he'd never been caught. He would take his bookbag in the store and ask the cashier to watch it for him. It made the cashier think he was afraid of having things stolen, and she would not keep an eye on him like she would the other kids. He never told this secret to anyone. If he had, other people would have done it, and then the cashier would have watched everyone, including him. He would put candy down his pants and in his coat pockets; then he would get a pack of gum and pay for it. He always bought Wrigley's Juicy Fruit. It was his trademark. At school, he would sell what he had stolen.

"You were a smart kid, Joey. You never got caught; let's not start now," he said to himself. "There are only six stop lights until we get to our road. Just get home," he encouraged himself. Then he realized that he was talking to himself. He wondered if he was schizophrenic. It reminded him of a song by Styx that said 'I'm schizophrenic, and so am I.' He didn't want to be schizophrenic. He closed his mouth tightly and stared at the road through the rain-covered windshield.

There were headlights behind him again. This time he was sure they were police lights. What would he do if the police knew it was him? He'd never been in jail. He wished he had stayed home and watched "All Star Wrestling". But, he had to go out. He was bored. Or was he aimless? He had to answer aimless. The car behind him turned.

The rain made the air conditioning in the car leave spots of moisture on the windshield that grew and made it hard for Joe to see. He knew if he turned it off, the car would fog up the way it did when you went parking with your date after the movie. So he left it on.

He pulled a cigarette out of his breast pocket, put it in his mouth, and pushed the lighter in. ZZ Top was on the radio, and at this point Joe thought the radio was his only friend. He lit the cigarette with two stop lights to go. He flicked his ashes onto the floor because his ash tray was jammed shut. The ashes floated to the ground like falling leaves from a tree and landed without a sound. He looked down and realized that he was letting ashes fall onto his new shoes. He would have to clean them off when he got home. He was turning onto his road. He forgot the turn signal. He felt bad. If someone was behind him, he could have caused an accident.

The T.V. was still on as he got out of the car. He was no longer bored. He had had enough activity that night to last a lifetime, or was it enough activity to lose him a lifetime? He hoped not.

He sat on the front porch to clean off his shoes.

My Name Isn't #2003641. It's Joe.

His cell was very monotonous and lifeless. He had a cot that was chained to the wall, a bedside table, and a toilet. Three walls were made of cement blocks and were painted 'fairy blue' as it was known to the prisoners. In prison the term 'fairy' didn't mean someone that was gay. Because, if that were the case, most of them would fall under that definition. No, to the prisoners, fairy meant weak. And if there was one thing that prisoners didn't want to be considered, it was weak.

The walls in the cell were interesting for the first few weeks though. The people in the cell before him had used it as a place to write on. Joe thought that it would be a good idea for somebody to write a book on prison graffiti. Hell, they'd done one on graffiti in the Big 10. The walls reminded Joe of the employee's bulletin board they'd had when he worked at Munch King. Now he worked for the state and this was not an employee board, it was an 'I'm bored and have nothing else to do' board. He wondered if he'd be able to work at Munch King again if he escaped.

He had counted the number of cement blocks that kept him in his 'room' many times. There were 420 of them. 140 on each of the three walls. He hadn't written anything on them yet, but he was thinking about it. He wanted his saying to be important and useful to other prisoners. His favorite thing on the wall was written by prisoner #980124. It said: 'Am I curious about being a homo? Yes, I'm curious. But I'm also curious about jumping off a cliff and I've never done that either.' It was strange and that was why Joe liked it.

The fourth wall was actually not a wall at all. It was a huge gate. This gate looked like the gates that people sometimes use to keep people from going in certain rooms of a house. They kept people out but they still showed what the room looked like. Joe's gate was not like that at all. It was there to keep him in. It could not be climbed, squeezed through, jumped over, dug under, or 'open says-a-me' opened. Joe had tried all of these things many times and the only thing that worked was a little black button that he did not have access to. Life was a bitch he thought. And God, he was bored here.

He was waiting for the day that he would be able to walk out of this cell and know that he would not have to come back. He was waiting for the day that he could go out to the store and buy himself another pair of Nike's. His were now almost a year old, and they looked like it.

He had to go to the bathroom. To be frank he had to 'pull out the brown banana' as he said. But he hated 'going' here. The toilet was in the corner of the room and the cells across the way could see him. At home it was nice to go to the bathroom because it was private. Here it was very much public. They laughed when someone grunted while on he pot. And the seat was always cold. It gave him goose bumps. Yes, he could hold it until everyone was asleep.

He stretched out on his cot and looked up to the corner where the wall meets the ceiling. In the middle of the back wall at the very top

was a bar-covered window the size of a small T.V. He wished he could watch T.V. He wished he was on the other side of the window. He fell asleep with his shoes on and dreamed about the hell he was going through.

The dream couldn't have been anything like the Hell he was going to.

I'm Walking Out . . . I'm Going To Hell

"How was your last dinner in the shit hole, Joey?" asked Richard the prison cook. He was serving two life terms.

"Great," Joe answered. He didn't know what else to say. He didn't lie. The food was good, for prison food. He didn't know what to say because he couldn't believe he was never going to eat dinner with Rich again. Today he was really going to walk out of that prison cell and never return. He looked at the dinner plate in front of him. The few left over potatoes and cottage cheese with ketchup reminded him of a bleeding nose on newly fallen snow. He didn't know why. He liked ketchup on his cottage cheese. Richard Nixon ate it that way. The plate and the fork that he was given were plastic. He wasn't issued a knife, that would have been dangerous. Yes, the food was great, for prison food.

He got up from the dinner table and walked back to his cell. He had to stop twice and wait for a guard to push that magical button to open 'gates.' When he got to his cell he walked in and sat down.

He looked around the cell. He looked at the walls and counted the blocks one last time. 420. He hadn't made a mistake. He picked up his pencil from the floor and put it up to the wall. It was his last day and he still hadn't written anything on the walls. He spent the majority of his recreational time, which consisted of sitting and sleeping, thinking about what he would write when he left and he still wasn't sure. He wrote: Sept. 29, 1986 #2003641. Then he stopped.

He wasn't sure but the thought he heard them coming to get him. He heard the echo of a gate opening somewhere in the complex. He only had a few minutes left here so he wrote quickly: 'In my stay here I've learned that . . . ' That what? Hell, he didn't know. What would he write? Was he going to choke at this point in his prison career? He hoped not.

He had always heard that when you got out of prison they gave you $20 to start out with. He wondered if he was going to get $20. He was, in a way, getting out of prison. He was sure he heard them coming now. He only had a few seconds. He looked down at his shoe string colored tennis shoes and remembered what they had looked like when they were new and shiny white. They had held up pretty good for two and three quarter years, though. He finished his words on the wall: the best shoes are NIKE'S.

"Joe," it was the warden and two guards. "It's time to go."

"Okay," Joe answered. The warden watched him carefully as he got up from the cot. Joe looked around the room and then down at his tennis shoes. He thought about his time here and how the times of going to the bathroom in public were now over. As he walked out of

the cell and down the hall for the last time he watched his feet and counted the cracks in the cement floor as he walked over them. One . . . two . . . three . . . step on a crack break your mother's back. He remembered doing that when he was growing up. Four . . . five . . . He remembered stealing the candy when he was little and how he never got caught. Six. He remembered the day he bought his tennis shoes and he remembered the night he was bored. He was sorry about the girl; the gun was an accident.

Yes, he knew. He knew, where he was going being bored was going to be a luxury.

I Think I'll Have a Seat

The room was small. It took him 32 cracks to get here. It was painted 'fairy' blue like everything else in the prison. This would be the last room that he would be in while he was in prison. Nothing was in it other than the chair that very few people got the privilege to sit in. The chair was brown, ugly, had a large back and straps, and reminded Joe of an old time wheel chair. Or some sort of kinky sexual device. Joe could tell that it had just been dusted because around the posts of the back there were grayish-white areas that had been missed. They cleaned it for me, Joe thought with pride. They cleaned it for me.

There were windows on one side of the room. Behind the windows sat ten people that Joe had never seen before. He knew they were there as witnesses to this 'event." Hell, he thought, some of them had probably bet each other on how long it would take. Ten seconds, 30 seconds, a minute or two. He sat down and looked at them. He smiled. No one smiled back so he flipped them off. He had always wanted to do that to people that did not acknowledge him, and now he had the chance. And besides, someone was going to make money from him in this 'event' so he could do whatever he wanted.

The guard put the straps around his arms and legs. What a seat belt, Joe thought. Maybe I should thank him for belting me. Belt someone. The way he must have looked Joe thought he would have been a good candidate for the star role in a science-fiction movie. The way he felt, he could have flipped this chair ten times and walked away. Unfortunately, he would never get that chance to walk away, or even flip the chair. The guard strapped his head in. I wonder how many blocks are in these walls? Another guard brought a bag over. Hey, no one has written on these walls yet. The bag was placed over Joe's head. Don't want the people to see the steam come out of my ears, Joe thought. The last thing he noticed were his shoes. God, were they good shoes. Hey, he thought, I'm really sorry about the girl.

"Pull the switch," Joe heard someone yell.

His toes wiggled and twitched in his shoes.

Four Poems

by Jay Lesandrini

It's a long time back
to 15 N. Second Street
where nothing changes but
the seasons; turning years
into memories of a
sidewalk, splitting our front
lawn like a cement cross.
I can remember each room
separately, as though each
is a house that contains
a memory of my youth.
There, in my bedroom, I
awake — nine years old
with summer thought resting
beneath a fresh snowfall.
My mother sleeps lightly
downstairs, alone. She dreams
of my father, now four years
dead; buried beside sister
at the Holy Cross Cemetery.
But I am happy not knowing that
death takes no holidays.
In three years, my childhood
will end, and I will be left
with only memories of
15 N. Second Street,
Evansville, Wisconsin.

George Fritcher would come over
with his wife every Tuesday
to play pinochle with my parents.
George owned the local popcorn stand,
where he sold sno-cones and cotton
candy from the trailer parked
adjacent to The Pizza Palace
on S. Main St., across the tracks.
He always brought popcorn to us
when he came to play cards. And
I would stay up and eat popcorn,
and listen to them talk, and then
slowly fall asleep on my mother's
lap, and they would have to stop
the game so that she could put me
to bed. On Christmas, George would
come to our house dressed as Santa,
and deliver presents to us kids.
When my father died, Tuesday
nights became lonely without
popcorn, but Christmas remained
the same, until George died.

On certain Sunday mornings
I would walk alone to St. Paul's
Catholic Church, on the corner
of First and Garfield streets.
I would leave my house when
the church bells rang (fifteen
minutes before mass) and sometimes
I'd make it on time. I
always sat in a back pew
when I was alone; or instead
I would ascend to the choir loft
to observe the ritual that
I seldom felt a part of.
At St. Paul's, the choir had
long since disbanded, and now
the loft was a haven for
rebellious youths whose only
reason for religion was to
please parents. I knew no other
reason for religion, and I
accepted this as reason enough.
So I would take communion,
following the others to the back
of the church, making no right
turn at the door to the loft —
and the last ten minutes of mass.
Instead, I would walk straight out,
blessing myself as I left; with
a guilt that evaporated
as quickly as the Holy Water
that dripped from my forehead.

Your Hair

—for Shelley

Your hair has just travelled from
1968 to 1986 in just over
an hour's time; and now it rests
in a trash can in some hair-
cutting joint that your sister
frequents, and suggested that you
do the same.

You look just fine. No complaints.
Even Dylan has changed in
eighteen years; and if you like
your hair in 1986, then so do
I, though you no longer look
perfect for a bookcover of
Brautigan's.

A Poem

by Charley Adams

Copy cat killers face flat
On the floor
Chalk line circles corpse's circumference -
Thighs, hips, lips, legs,
Toes show up
Tagged
Trading words for dollars
Riding beggars without wishes
leaving all the dirty dishes
There's a copy cat
Who switches
Trades in his coal
For switches
And gives up poetry for sales.

A Story

by T. Schenck

It's Sunday. He'd stayed at m'house agin, an I'm beginin t'wonder if he's ever goin home. I knowed thut him an his mom don't git 'long too well, an thut his pops is been dead fer I don't know how long, but m'mom is startin t'wonder 'bout him. His name is Conroy Adams. He's 'bout six feet tall and lanky, but he's perty well defined muscle-wise. He's got sandy brown hair thut's bushy and brissly, and eyes thut's the color brown of the rusty ol wagon wheel thut lies out back. Y'all thut don't know whut color thut I'm tawkin 'bout, it's 'bout the color a m'pickup truck. He's perty much a rough-houser, kinda a punch without a warnin, if ya know whut I mean, but at the same time he's perty well educated, seein hows he's bin through a lot a years a schoolin, a lot more thin I has anyways. As a matter a fact, he come within a toad's hair a graduatin from high school.

Well anyways, Roy, thut's whut everbudy calls him is Roy, he ain't much the church goin kind, an I am, and since it's Sunday, an since it's m'bound duty t'git people t'go t'church so they kin go t'heaven once they die, I figered thut I'd ask Roy t'go with me this mornin. T'my surprise he said thut he wud an even though all he had was an ol pair a knee-torn blue jeans, an a flannel shirt with a blue jean patch on the elbow, I knew thut God wud bless me fer bringin Roy 'long t'church with me t'day. I drove, cus I was the inviter, and we was jus a wee bit late arrivin at church. An I started watchin Roy as we was a gittin outa the truck, an he looked a might spooked, cus I think thut this was the first an only time thut he'd ever bin t'church, an thut got me t'thinkin a why he'd want t'come, but thin I r'membered thut God works in mysterious ways an it wasn't m'place t'be askin them kinda questions. Anyways, me an Roy, both t'gether walked up t'the two reflectin glass doors thut ya cud see yerself in, and I dressed kinda like Roy t'make him feel a little more comfortable, an I didn't think thut God wud mind me a dressin like this cus after all, I'm doin m'bound duty as a Christian. Well anyways we walked through the reflectin doors, an I looked at Roy, an his eyes was a lightin up like a lantern, kinda like they did whin thut blacky had him cornered in the bushes down b'the ol goose-pond. Boy, he was so scared thut day thut he come near t' peein in . . . well thut's a differnt story. Well anyways, I figered thut the reason Roy was so surprised is the fact thut he ain't seen no place so imac. . .imacu. . .so perty b'fore in his life. Cus up t'this time, his life ain't bin the best in the world, an m'church is perty nice, an no afence, but it's a hundered times nicer thin the rat-hole thut Roy lives in. But anyways, whin we walked in, everbudy in the congregation was a standin up and a prayin, an I was goin t'tell Roy t'be silent an bow his head, but he was already quiet so I figered thut thut was good 'nough, so I didn't bother him.

Roy seemed real interested in church, but he seemed a lot more intersted in Maggie Carter, I cud tell cus his eyes was fixed on her

through the whole sermon. Maggie's probly the pertiest girl thut ever graced the halls a m'church, but I never looked at her the way Roy was a lookin at her in church, cus I knowed thut it was a mortal sin t'lust in church, an I figered thut I got 'nough sins piled up under m'belt anyways an I didn't need no more. But anyways, I kinda nudged Roy t'git his 'tention, an tode him t'folla me, an he did, cus now they was all done with prayin an they was gittin ready t'sing outa them ol torn 'part him. . .hym. . .books. Well I knowed thut it was fine and dandy t'find us a place t'sit, so we did. It was right b'hind fat ol Miss BVelcher. Everbudy knowed how Miss Belcher was, an nobudy really much cared fer her, an it was kinda sad but it happens, cus she was a. . .well she wasn't the most polite lady I ever seen. Well anyways, she ain't never bin married an she is gittin up in years, I'm not fer sure how ol thut she is but I heared Reverend Jacobs tawkin bout her an he said thut she gains a pound with ever year, an she takes up haf a pue the way it is, so I reckon thut she's perty ol. Well anyways, we all stood up t'sing an whin we did we, me an Roy, noticed thut Miss Belcher's dress was a crammed up her crack, an it wasn't a perty sight. It mus a bin from all thut weight a scootin back an forth across the seat. Well anyways I didn't much pay 'tention at first, but Roy kep a nudgin me an a laughin, an I didn't think thut it was thut funny, as a mattera fact, I kinda felt sorry fer her cus everbudy was a laughin, so I d'cided t' help her out an pull her dress outa her crack. I don't think thut I knowed whut I was gittin m'self in to cus 'bout thut time she let out a God-awful scream an come 'round full force on Roy's head an knocked him fer a loop. Thing 'bout it was thut Roy thought it was funny an started laughin, but not me boy, I thought thut I'd done somethin real wrong, an thut she liked her dress like thut, so I poked it back in there, an her she come all three-hundered an some odd pounds a her an plowed Roy up the other side a the head. By now Roy was all red-faced an as mad as a hog in a corner wantin t'bust out. I thought fer sure thut Roy was goin t'sock her back, an my grandpa always said thut the more ya stir shit thut the worse it stinks, so I yanked Roy out in the isle, an I pulled him down the isle, an all the time he was jus cussin up a storm, an I was jus a askin left an right fer God's fergiveness fer whut had happened in his holy house. Roy kep a cussin an didn't think nothin 'bout it cus he didn't much understand, but I finally got him t'the reflectin glass doors, an everbudy was a lookin at us, and I cud tell outa all the confusion thut Roy was a lookin over at Maggie, an her an everbudy else was lookin at us. I kinda got a small hint a how Jesus felt whin he walked bearin the cross an all the people a laughin an hecklin him. Well anyways, me an Roy got outside, an I felt mighty 'shamed a m'self cus I knowed thut Roy got the wrong idea a whut church is s'posed t'be like. But, the thing 'bout it was thut Roy didn't even tawk 'bout whut happened in church with Miss Belcher, all he tawked 'bout was how perty Maggie was. It was like thut was the only thing on his mind. But not me boy, all I had m'mind on was gittin outa there an maybe findin a new church where nobudy knowed who I was. Anyways, me an Roy got in t'm'truck and got ready t'head home.

Fall

by Lisa Bucki

The tamarack,
its wavering
leaves heaving a
red fire at me,
bites at the back
of Earth's great love.

The throat is bruised
by the tough blue
fingers which ruin
Earth's mud, cool skin.
A slipping grip makes
root stoop, not dive.

The space around
looks like a wheel,
with barren ground
broken by spokes.
The whorl hurled out
above, as limbs.

Sublimation

by Charley Adams

Her words melt,
Drift,
And turn to vapour,
Frosting on thought
Like the grass —
Becoming white
With the rain of the moon
In winter.

A Picture of Lucy Rose

by Sarah Hill

The last weekend of every September the fair stopped in town. There was neither a large park nor a broad street, so the town was forced to forego the luxury of rides, the yellow and red machines like giant spiders and hands, the long falling screams from the top of the sky to the roots of the grass—you could feel it under your shoes—other towns had parks for rides or at least parking lots. But in Bentonville, the widest street was narrow, the main street that dissected the town, houses brick with a row of geraniums out front to the north, clapboard and marigolds to the south, was created solely for pedestrian games. Not a beer can or a gum wrapper anywhere, either. Every week a red garbage truck with "Satisfaction Guaranteed or Double Your Trash Back" printed in white letters on the side lazed its way through a crisscross pattern the driver had arranged the town into. The children ran in front, throwing gum wrappers and bits of paper into the gutter, sure that they would be removed.

A row of booths rose overnight down each side of Main Street; by ten o'clock Saturday morning, frying sausage, onions, and peppers thickened the air, an almost liquid rich odor, with an occasional stab of sugar, elephant ears, cotton candy, blue, pink, white.

The fair, or festival it was called to distinguish it from the local carnivals specializing in chance games and suspicious young men in unreadable T-shirts, was intended to be a celebration of the turning leaves. But for the last five years, it had rained every day in September, was at least 80 degrees, and the only leaves that changed, and they were few, turned brown and fell in soggy heaps around the trunks of trees. No one was looking at the leaves anyway, except to shake off one or two that clung in tatters to their shoes as they stepped into their cars in the evening. No one looked higher than the top boards of the booths, where plastic dolls hung, strings around their stiff pink necks, their tiny arms and legs pointing out four directions. Or headbands stuck with feathers (this was once an Indian settlement) painted green and yellow, secured in plastic that was hidden by the hair of the wearer, a very authentic look. The booths were jammed up against either curb, leaving just enough street for traffic. The cars halted and children skipped and skidded between them, their mothers smiling apologetically under frowning eyebrows at the drivers, who smiled indulgently back, if they were leaving, avoided the look, if they were just arriving.

Henry Wright sat in his booth at the corner of Main and Oak streets. This had been his spot for ten years, slightly separated from the others, because of the cross street, but close enough to be convenient. The booth was on the lot of the best filling station in town, and people were sure to see it; he could see them leaning out of their windows as they drove past. Henry was an artist, a painter,

who disdained the popular use of disc blades and handsaws to decorate with barns in summer and winter creeks. His outbuildings and streams were on canvas, and he was careful to sign each one legibly, so the purchaser would remember his name. There were few buyers, but everyone looked, and Henry preferred to think that he catered to a select group who could tell the difference between real art and scene drawing.

A young couple approached, the woman two steps ahead and almost dragging her husband by the elbow, he eating something unidentifiable out of white paper. She ran her hand lightly down the sides of the frames of two or three and turned to look at the young man. He stooped to read the prices and straightened up again with a low whistle. Henry lit a cigarette, crossed his legs and focussed with determination on a yellow nylon cap swinging from a stall across the street. They would not buy. The cap had some insignia in the middle of the forehead, black letters, he thought, and the swaying motion reminded him absurdly of black-eyed susans, but the odor was wrong, it should be that aching brown weedy smell, not this sweet onion with the sugar wrapping, and then someone lifted the hat down abruptly, leaving a silver hook; Henry looked back and the couple had wandered away.

He began cataloguing the paintings he had brought with him—three barns, four streams, a small farmhouse—Henry half-closed his eyes against the brilliancy of the colors. Today was the first really blue autumn day of the year, and he remembered the black and white field, painted a dozen years before, that he had turned up in deciding what to bring with him. He had discarded it from the stack as unsalable, but now Henry wanted to see it again. He opened his eyes wider and mentally he walked through his front door, over the green carpet in the living room that bloomed here and there with rust-red coffee stains, and down the wooden steps—they were more slats than boards; Henry had built them himself after the others had collapsed—into the basement. The basement, only half sunken, was Henry's workroom. He would sit under the south windows that lined up under the ceiling and paint from memory; it was the only way he could really see what he wanted to come up on the canvas before him. The colorless field had been one of his father's; he could remember, as a child, perhaps eight or nine, lying in the gray grass and watching it melt into the sky as the light tilted into darkness early evenings. And the cornflowers and thistles, the wild daisies, disappeared and reappeared, rising into small faces without expression. He could be in it again without the confusion of color, his field could be a gray lake with disembodied faces floating on the surface, or an ashpit littered with the remains of dolls, their bodies armless like the stems of some weeds. Or a simple stretch of grass, where small women walked, their hands folded into their aprons, each face a wash of dark against a white background.

A middle-aged woman with hair a shade of glittering red too uniform to be natural, packed into a pair of discount-store polyester

slacks, held the small winter farmhouse, first at arms-length, then almost to her nose, then back out again. The sky in the painting was more intense than the one she held the canvas up into, and she whispered "beautiful" and "lovely" to herself, laying it on the concrete between her feet and the tissue skirt of the booth, and propping it against the peeling 2x4 at the corner. Henry watched her claw through her vinyl handbag, pause, "do you take credit cards?"—Henry shook his head, "I'm sorry, no, I don't"—resume the search almost headfirst, and finally emerge triumphant with a fat billfold. She counted out the bills, too many, with precision, and Henry noticed a mustard stain on her blouse. He turned to the tin cash box on the stool beside him where his cigarette also lay, the burning end off the edge. It rolled, when Henry opened the box, off-balance, onto the ground and under the tissue skirting. Henry's eyes could see the spark catch the paper, a smolder first, then just one more breeze and a rush of flame around the booth and up four corners at once. It would go up like a stall of old newspaper, like a cardboard dollhouse. The tissue curtains around the top would melt in a second, there would, of course, be time to step out, but there was no time to save the paintings that were wired to their hooks, the large ones, for security. Henry saw the snowy barns and blue reflective creeks curl out of their frames, the frames snap apart and fall, and a skyful of gray flakes swirl away across the roof of the filling station.

The woman in the polyester pants put a sneaker toe down on the cigarette and tightened her top lip. Henry noticed how her chin puckered with the look and how her underlip whitened. He placed the painting into a grocery sack for her, handed her the change, and knew he was expected to say "have a nice day."

A gray moth was hovering outside the window, the expected mottled color, but uncommonly large. When Lucy lifted her hand and tapped the glass, it rose suddenly away; Lucy saw two patches of orange, one on each wing, light up like small suns on a stormy morning. Then the moth was gone and the girl turned back toward her room. She should have been dressed before now, everyone would be at the fair already, but Pam, her best friend since they both were children, was out of town, and Lucy really had no one to go with. She opened her drawer and fingered first one sweater then another, the air had chilled overnight with the passing of the rain, until her mother called her down to breakfast. Lucy yanked the one on top over her head, stretching out the sleeves and not caring, stepped into her jeans and shoes with the motion of a colt walking through long wet grass, and headed toward the smell of cocoa and hot bread.

Her mother was setting out plates and cups, and Lucy slouched into a chair. To the question, "Are you going to the festival today?" she said "Uh-huh" in a tone neither resentful nor rebellious. Lucy asked, "Can I have some money?" and her mother countered, "Will you help me clean out the garage some time this weekend?" The girl shrugged and nodded, her mother said, "Such enthusiasm" and fished a ten-dollar bill out of her purse that always lay on the kitchen counter. When the daughter finished eating and started for the door,

she said good-bye to the mother without turning her head, and mother said have a good time without noticing.

Lucy walked the five blocks to the main street. A balloon floated above her head and tangled itself in a maple tree. She looked up and saw the sun through the branches. It lit up the first yellow in the trees. She had never looked at this tree before, although she had passed it almost every day of her life, and the color startled her for a moment. Lucy stepped into the street. She knew the traffic patterns of festival days and avoided the cars without looking at them. She scanned the edge of the crowd for another high-school face and, instead, met the eye of Mr. MacCaffrey, who sat beside a steaming cast-iron cauldron that had once been a scalding pot. Lucy had heard the story of the scalding pot. It had once belonged to her own grandfather and he had loaned it to the MacCaffreys, rusted as it was, from lack of use. The MacCaffreys had cleaned it to use at the festival, — this was before Lucy was even walking — and had used it every year since. Her father had asked for it back, and the MacCaffreys had claimed it was theirs now, citing all the work it had taken to clean it up as evidence. Lucy's father had let the matter drop, not wanting a dispute with old family friends. But every year at festival time he would say over dinner, "I ought to get that pot back" and Lucy's mother would agree.

The MacCaffreys were cooking barbecued pork. Lucy walked over to where Mr. MacCaffrey sat in a lawn chair, his face pink and sweating even though his son was doing the stirring. Lucy thought with his old white hair he looked like some pigs she had seen on her grandfather's farm. He said "Good morning, Lucy, where you hiding all your boyfriends?" and she smiled and said, "Hi, Mr. MacCaffrey, Mrs. MacCaffrey. Lucy looked into the pot. The pork was shredded and bubbling in the sauce; bits of flesh would cling to the sides of the pot and Mr. MacCaffrey's son scraped them down with a long paddle. The thought formed itself in Lucy's mind that it was like blood, that deep red. Her head, down the sides of her nose and between her eyes, started to ache with the smell. Lucy said, "See you later" and walked away. Mr. MacCaffrey smiled at his wife. They had known Lucy and her family for a long time.

Lucy walked down one side of the street past two or three booths. A woman was selling dolls, and she stopped at the sight of them. Laid out on the wooden counter were the expensive handsewn baby dolls. Their faces were quilted to form eyes, nose, mouth, even a small dimple on the chin. Behind these stood the rag dolls; their faces were merely painted on. On the chair beside the woman was a stack of plastic dolls, wrapped in cellophane. A dozen of these, no longer than Lucy's hand, were tucked in at the edges of the display. The dresses of these were hand-embroidered around the hem. Lucy chose a plastic doll and paid for it with part of the money her mother had given her. She unwrapped it as she walked away and laid it in her purse.

Across the street were booths of handicrafts, pottery and clothing. Lucy walked over and met a group of girls, older than herself. Their

eyes went through her deliberately and Lucy began sorting and arranging the coverlets and vests on a table as though she were deciding on something to buy. Scarves and belts were hanging from the top of the stall, and with a sudden small breeze a bright red twist of cloth curled into Lucy's hair and around her neck. She felt the heat rise in her face and as she freed herself the cloth came unhooked in her hand. It was a coarse, handwoven sash, long enough to wrap twice around her waist. The woman in the shadow of the booth looked at Lucy. Lucy opened her purse, pushed past the doll lying there, and brought out the correct amount. Then she peeled the price sticker from the corner of the sash and handed it, along with the money to the woman. She received it with a professional smile and said, "Thank you, dear."

Lucy tied the sash over her sweater, around her middle, so that just the fringed ends hung free. With the new weight on her waist, her chest was strangely cool, and she moved on without really seeing anything. She did, however, catch a glimpse of herself in a store window as she passed, and she was surprised to see how the new belt accentuated her figure. She had a slight build but looked like a grown woman with her waist cinched.

An alley intersected the main street, and it was closed to traffic during the festival. Three boys, or young men, had taken possession of it. They were playing a sort of ball game with the chunks of pavement from the alley's potholes. Each boy had a heavy stick in his hand and knocked a chunk so that it collided with the brick wall on whichever side of the alley was farthest from him. None would have admitted that it was a contest, but if any of them failed to drive his piece of pavement all the way across the alley, the others jeered and poked him, and he tried harder the next time.

When Lucy passed the alley, it was not she that caused them to glance up, but the flash of red. But they saw who it was instantly; Lucy was in their class at school and they raised their sticks from their game to follow her.

"Hey, Lucy Rose."

At the sound of her full name, the girl stopped. Something in it she was unaccustomed to, and she turned to identify what seemed to be familiar voices. She saw the three boys and tilted her chin up a bit. They repeated the name that had stopped her. "Hey, Lucy Rose, with the red belt, where you going?" The three pointed the sticks at her, as if they were weapons, and Lucy thought, for a second, of sticking her tongue out at them. Instead, she unwound the belt from her waist and flung one end of it at them, still holding onto the other end. The boys shrank as if she had pulled out a weapon greater than theirs and scooted back down the alley. Lucy watched until they were gone and then wadded up the cloth and shoved it into her jeans pocket. The air came up under her sweater and goose pimples rose on her arms and thighs.

Two girls from Lucy's school were just across the street from her, at the booth where she had first stopped. Lucy did not step over to them, deciding not to try and dodge the traffic again, which seemed

to have become heavier. The fair was only a block long and she could cross at the end of the street and maybe meet them coming back. Her purse bumped against her hip; she could feel the plastic head of the doll beating out the rhythm of her walk, timing the pace. And the belt in her pocket was uncomfortable. Lucy wore her jeans snug, like the other girls her age, and never carried anything in her pockets. She looked over her shoulder and pulled it out. The red cloth rippled and curled. Lucy flicked it out and tied it again around her. She shifted the bag on her shoulder and was completely readjusted by the time she crossed the intersection at the end of the block.

Lucy saw Henry before he saw her. She had always thought that Henry's eyes, when he smoked, sort of drifted and turned blank, but she could see, as she approached him from the side, that he was looking through the smoke, that his eyes were fixed on something across the street. She wondered what it was.

"Hi, Henry, what are you looking at?" Lucy ducked under the edge of the booth.

"Well, Lucy, hello." Henry set the cash box on the cement under his feet, and the girl sat down. "Look over there," Henry pointed to the parking area outside the telephone company down the cross street. "You see that little red car, the convertible? Now look right above it. That sycamore tree is going to drop about a thousand seeds into that car, and the guy who owns it is not going to notice because he's so happy that he spent all his money today, and next summer he's going to wonder where all the little sycamore trees in his yard came from because there aren't any in the subdivision where he lives." Lucy laughed and Henry added, "And the third time he mows them off and they grow back, he'll call the chemical company to come spray them."

"You're probably right, Henry." Lucy leaned back and stretched her legs out straight in front of her. "Sold anything today?"

"Yeah, one. It's a good thing I don't make my living this way."

Lucy smiled at him. She didn't know how Henry did make his living. She knew that he had lived in town until her grandfather retired from his farm, that he had moved into the farmhouse, that he was some kind of distant cousin through her father. He didn't keep any stock on the place, but the yard was mowed and he planted a garden every year. He kept the porch swing hanging, too, although he never painted it, and Lucy would ride her bicycle out Saturday mornings in summer and lie swinging until the sweat dried on her forehead and she could no longer hear her blood in her head.

"Do you need help packing your stuff up tonight?"

"You've got better things to do on Saturday night, don't you?"

Lucy shrugged, and he said, "I've got that small one for your mother. We can bring it back after we've unloaded everything."

"Why haven't you ever painted anything for me? My birthday's next week, and I have a big empty spot on my wall."

"Well, all right, I'll see what I can do. Be back about dark."

"O.K." Lucy stood up and walked away down the cross street back toward her house. Henry saw her meet Mrs. Anderson and her four-

year-old daughter. Lucy bent down to the little girl, and Henry saw how she and the older woman inclined together, their heads the same height and almost touching, the flow of their hair breaking across their shoulders and falling to where the child could reach up and pull it down to her. She did so, and Mrs. Anderson laughed, freeing herself and Lucy with a slight tug. Mrs. Anderson was a young woman and this was her first child.

Henry and Lucy worked for an hour after dark, crossing back to the pickup from the house and returning carrying one painting at a time. The only difficult part of the job was maneuvering down the basement stairs; you couldn't keep your balance looking over the top of the painting, and if you lifted it up, its shadow blackened the steps. So the only way was step by step blindly, toe first, then solid foot, a bounce to be sure, then the next step. Every time Lucy finally felt the concrete of the basement floor under her toe, cool and unyielding, her knees weakened a little and her insides felt as though a bag of marbles had burst there and scattered. She thought this was Henry's best work. She waited, sitting on a wooden stool with her heels in the rungs, while Henry brought down the last one and stacked it with the others. She saw Henry's gray field where he had set it out, away from the others and against the wall. Lucy picked the painting up from the floor. "Is this yours? Did you do this?"

"About a hundred years ago. Do you like it?"

"I think it's great. How come I've never seen it before?"

"I had it hidden. No, that's not true, I forgot about it. You really like it? Well, bring that stool for me and come upstairs. I'm going to do one for you like it."

Lucy picked up the stool. "It's going to be kind of hard to see the fields at night, isn't it?"

"I'm not going to do another field. You get to be the subject this time. Your mom knows where you are, doesn't she?"

"Me? Really?" Lucy stopped and lifted the stool in one hand. "You want me to sit on this?"

"You can sit wherever you want. That's for me. An old man can't paint standing up, you know."

Upstairs, Henry turned on every light in the living room. Lucy sat on the brick hearth in front of the cold fireplace and Henry set the stool by the window. The girl asked, "Is this all right?" and he answered "Fine, however you're comfortable." And he began to set an image of her on the canvas in black and white, or, no, in varying shades of gray. She filled the hearth, and Henry shaded in her eyes dark. Lucy had a strong brow, like her mother. Even with the light, he couldn't see their color, but they were dark. Her cheekbones were wide and set high; the lamp on the mantle above her head brought them out white, diminished the mouth, which Lucy held gravely still for him, and darkened the neck. A streak of light ran down both sides of the part in her hair; the hair itself, falling straight on either side of her face, and hanging almost to her waist, squared up the thin shoulders. Henry could see the shapes of the bones in her arms, although she wore a long-sleeved sweater.

Henry thought she looked like an Indian girl sitting on the floor. Lucy sat cross-legged, without a stir, but there was a look of motion, potential motion, in the easy angle of the leg, the curve of the foot. Henry was as still as she, except for his arm, which stroked and stroked at the canvas. To Lucy, Henry's sleeve, which was all she could see, seemed part of the drape behind him, and it flapped softly against the arm as though a summer wind had caught it up.

Lucy filled the hearth, and Henry enclosed her lightly, a darkness outlined with a suggestion of brick. He set her on a dusting of whitest black, the least gray that he could see. It might have been brick, concrete, the ground outside. She looked as though she might rise at any time and walk away.

It was only a sketch, and Henry was finished by the time Lucy said, "My feet are falling asleep, I need to move." He added a few lines while she stamped on the floor. "You don't really want to see this, do you?" He started to cover it with an old shirt that lay beside him. "Yes, I do. Come on, Henry, let me see it. It's for me, isn't it?" Henry smiled as she flung the shirt aside and bent over the sketch.

"It looks like my mother?"

"No, it's you. It looks like you."

Lucy's expression was doubtful, and she turned it around to a better light for her. Her eyes began to smile.

"I thought it was going to resemble your mother, too, at first, but it's like you, Lucy. It's really like you."

Clair de lune

by Paul Verlaine

Votre âme est un paysage choisi
Que vont charmant masques et bergamasques,
Jouant du luth et dansant et quasi
Tristes sous leuts déguisements fantasques.

Tout en chantant sur le mode mineur
L'amour vainqueur et la vie opportune,
Ils n'ont pas l'air de croire à leur bonheur
Et leur chanson se mêle au clair de lune,

Au calme clair de lune triste et beau,
Qui fait rêver les oiseaux dans les arbres
Et sangloter d'extase les jets d'eau,
Les grands jets d'eau sveltes parmi les marbres.

Moonlight

by Paul Verlaine

Translated by Debbie Edwards

Your soul is a chosen countryside
Where Italian mimes perform,
Playing the lute and dancing, somewhat
Sad beneath their whimsical disguises.

As they sing in the minor key
Of victorious love and expedient life,
They don't seem to believe in their happiness
And their song mingles with the light of the moon.

Calm moonlight, sad and beautiful,
Which makes the birds in the trees dream
And the fountains sob with ecstacy,
Great, willowy fountains among the cold marble.

A thank you note

by L. A. LeRoy

If I try

to say thank you, it seems as if it is not enough. So I will sit down to write a meaningful poem, and realize that you will only look at it as meaningless s

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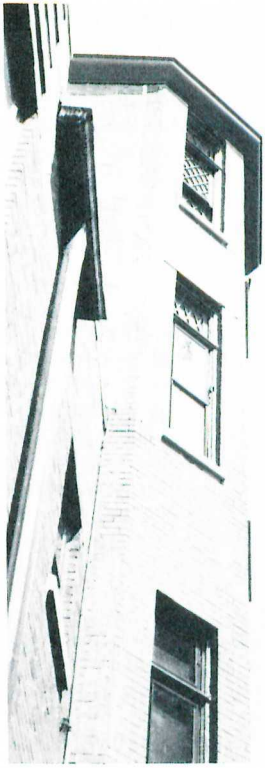
Now in my desperation, I will attempt to create the most perfect thank you speech. Then I will begin to practice my solioquy while wearing out the floor tile with my pacing. Finally, I will give you a hug, say good bye, and thank you ever so much. Then I'll wave as I drive away.



Music from the Window

by Rhet Lickliter

We moved through October. Each day, each night, turned together like well-greased gears, turning the mornings and afternoons, through a thousand shades of grey. Shadows stretched across evening sidewalks, they moved. We moved, like the hands of a clock, slowly climbing, coming back down, moving around the circle of each day. We straightened the calendar on the kitchen wall. We locked the doors and heard the sound of children in the park, below our balcony. We moved through October. Through 31 segments of 24 hours, we moved. And we sang, we sang about strangers — "look at their shoes" — and we moved. Together, we watched our hair fall into the sink while outside it rained, and the music from a car radio rose 20 floors. The furnace came on smelling of electricity. We went to the window and watched steam rush from the sewers, watched the October darkness, like time-lapse, surround the city and remove the light from our faces.

We moved through October. We rode the elevator with our neighbors who never said hello, with neighbors who looked up, paying attention to lights, making note of each floor we passed. We rode the elevator for the evening paper. We descended below the earth's surface into the laundry room for a soda pop. We moved. I painted. I painted about differences — a mistake made one weekend. We bought a car. We paid top dollar for a parking space. We paid top dollar for a bag of potato chips. I heard a woman's voice ask, "Why must things be so expensive in the city?" I made coffee on the stove in an open pot as we moved. High-rise windows allowed us to watch the world like a drive-in. We drank the coffee, and watched. We watched the traffic flow like blood around the curves, over and under each other on asphalt veins that reach and separate and travel in all directions. Stopping in towns and cities, connecting, reaching, joining driveways to highways, crossing rivers and railroad tracks, rising with mountains, and enduring the long, flat, farmlands. The traffic moved. We moved. I began a conversation with a musician upstairs, we talked as we moved, using only jungle shadows, using only the sounds of 106 drums, the interruption of a screaming lover. I called the elevator.

We moved through October, as honeymooners, newlyweds should move. And for some of us there would be no more long vacations, for some they had left, for others they had been exchanged for responsibility. We looked down at the trees as they changed colour and looked like carpeting. We reminded ourselves of several years ago, when this was a time not of death but of birth, not of death but of love. We took the garbage into the hall and dropped it through the floors,

237 ft. to the bottom, to the basement below the earth's surface. We called the time and set all clocks and watches. We awaited evening, as streetlights came on and the night traffic looked like a slow moving string of pearls in one direction, rubies in the other. We moved through the darkness like cats. We sank into the night.

We lie in the dark. We whisper and touch. To the sound of the dishwasher, a speeding car, rainwater dripping from a downspout, we lie. We watch faint glowing shapes move across the walls and ceiling. We hear the voices of radioghosts come drifting from latenight talkshows. And in the dark we rediscover the shape of a neck, the contour of a shoulder, a back, a hip, the sensitivity of our own fingertips. We talk. We talk of how the time has passed. We make plans.

I tell you how some nights I sneak into bed well after you've fallen asleep. You take strange shapes this late, but I don't wake you. I try not to move. I let you sleep while I look for room among the bed clothes and bent limbs. Some nights you make quiet noises in your sleep, as I climb into bed like a cat. Some nights are silent for you, dark, and in strange shapes.

We talk of a girl we once knew. We've heard she's unhappy, we've heard she's been hurt. Now she's seeing a doctor and we wonder if she will be alright, if she can make it through this. You tell me this happened before, it nearly killed her. She doesn't take things easily. We worry. We feel the breeze through the curtains in the dark. You tell me, you say, "I could never, I could never be married to a traveling salesman." We hear the sound of a truck passing, we hear it brake a block away — a mechanical whisper. Your skin is smooth like a night sea. The curtain lifts like the sail of a boat. We lie in the dark, we whisper and touch. You say, "Isn't it sad about Rene?"

Through hours of darkness we moved. Through the nights of October, we turned and traveled. The moon was an amputee's hook, hanging among constellations. The moon was a dinner plate — white china in the autumn sky. Through hours of darkness we moved, and we dreamed. We dreamed of destinations.

In our sleep, we watched him, like he was a T.V. program, like we had waited in line for tickets and we were the studio audience. It was a silent program. It was a silent dream. He seemed unaware of us, our presence. We were there to watch him work. He made frames. Out of wood and stain and varnish, using tools to measure and cut and carve and glue, he made beautifully ornate frames — frames on a stick. And we dreamed of frame assemblage.

We followed him like cameras, like our heads were on pivots and our bodies on dollies. We watched him travel after packing each frame carefully into the back of a truck. He drove into the country. He drove on the highways. He drove back to the city. He drove down alleys. He drove to the suburbs. He drove, while we tossed in our sleep.

He came upon a cemetery surrounded by black wrought iron fences and stone posts. The graveyard rolled like the ocean. Thousands of carved tombstones, marble crosses, granite angels rode acres of grassy waves. A large hill rose with gravesites clustered on all sides and a small drive winding up and around the hill. He climbed and circled in his little truck filled with frames. He climbed to the top. He parked, and we watched in our sleep. He removed a frame from the bed. It was large and made of dark wood. It was covered with intricate scroll work. He held the frame by its stick and began walking about the top of the hill, holding it out in front of him, looking through the empty frame. We saw the city to the south. From the hill the buildings looked small and far off. Through the frame they appeared two-dimensional. To the north we saw trees and hills, open land — an aerial photograph. He began looking quickly through the frame, first at the city, then spinning, looking back towards the trees, pivoting on a single point, holding the frame in front of him like a compass. He searched for the perfect spot, a magnetic spot, like a witcher tracking water, spinning on a single point, just the right angle, just the right spot, just the right view. He took a breath. With a single thrust he stabbed the stick into the ground. It stood straight, up, empty, so you could put your arm through it.

In our sleep we saw the city, architecture in the distance. We saw open land and expansive skies. We watched day turn into night, the sun descend behind buildings. We watched the wind move through the trees, and received the gift of new season — a gift that turns — a gift that returns, then leaves once it's been taken for granted.

And when we dreamed, we dreamed remembering.

From the front yard we heard music. In the late afternoon, near dinner time we would play together, Lisa and Kelly and Bethanne and me. Sometimes near the house on the swings or near the side fence where raspberries grew. But we heard the music when we played out in the front yard under the shade of maple and oak trees where little grass grew. As it began to get dark and we knew that soon we would be called in to eat, we would hear it. Sometimes a flute. Sometimes a violin. Smooth and beautiful music would come. We would go to the fence and I would rest my hands and my chin on the top wire. We would listen. The music came from an old farmhouse across the street. From a third story window propped open with curtains that seemed to be floating out with the music. Kelly said, "That's the Pasvar's, they're from Russia. They escaped on a boat a long time ago and came here to live." "What do they do?" I would ask. "The father reads books and the boy and the girl go to school to study music, the mother died some time ago." "The father reads books, that's all?" "As far as I know," Kelly would say.

I would nearly fall asleep listening while the fence held my weight and I pictured a little grey haired man sitting in an arm chair reading in near darkness, one floorlamp next to him creating a frayed circle of light. I looked across the street, up through maple and oak branches at a third story window, open while curtains seemed to struggle, wanting to ride the music off, away. I listened to the music from the window, wondering, hoping that it might travel all the way to Russia, and once there someone might answer back with notes a beautiful as these, notes we would understand — answer back, before I was called to dinner.

September was gone. Like a note struck on a piano soon fades. Like a short fuse. Like so many Sunday afternoons spent in mother's kitchen, visiting, talking and passing the time.

Another week had passed. Seven more summer days had gone by. Standing in the kitchen, listening, looking out the window, watching a ball being tossed, watching a young child pet a kitten. Thinking, this day, this time together, is another moment, another hour passing, uneventfully, unknowingly. I hear the talking, the voices are like several clocks marking the time, marking the moments and hours that pass, that travel through the room, that leave through the doors and windows. They pass through the walls like ghosts. They direct themselves. They ride a straight line. They ride it out, between the houses, over the roofs and through the treetops, passing through clouds like passengers on airplanes, able to say, "Look. That's the sky below us, and way down there, those are clouds, long giant clouds, thick white fumes, drifting like a herd of grazing animals, magnificent clouds." The moments leave. They leave the atmosphere like well directed rockets, and begin an eternity of floating in an endless black sea of white lights and coloured gasses.

It was gone. Afternoon breezes reminded us that vacations would soon end. They reminded us of change, of the coming cold weather. The homeless searched out the dry warm places. They were gone, like the late summer days called September. The shopping carts were off the streets and sidewalks. The big green trash bags slung over an aging shoulder half full of food scraps and aluminum cans, eaten and redeemed, gone. September was a prayer.

In the mirror I saw a beautiful woman pass by like a blur, like a movie out of focus, in slow motion. I blinked my eyes like a projector, allowing the light to illuminate each image, viewing our history in fragments, as it was made, storing it away like books in a library, this section titled Late Summer / Early Autumn. Every day before was now a film.

Yesterday I made a movie, in the rain, while a deaf man stood with arthritic posture in a long brown jacket and untied boots. He spoke with his hands to another, while the water lightly fell into puddles on the ground like stolen kisses. I made a movie, while reflections bent and moved in the water, as if the stationary things, houses, trees, cars and trucks had been liberated from their rigid forms, now able to twist and contort — a strange dance. It was yesterday, and with my camera I captured the stolen kisses, the secret dances, in the rain.

September was gone. Like the summer, so September had left. Like old people sitting all day in the park watching and feeding birds, listening to the fountains. They would soon rise and walk, and wait for the bus. They would stand like trees planted far enough apart to allow for air and sun and rain, for growth. And then they would leave, one or two at a time, looking not at each other, only leaning out, looking down the street, waiting for their bus to break, with the sound of escaping breath, and pull over to the curb, for the bus driver to fold open the door and impatiently await their slow-motion entry, their careful coming aboard, their old-age ascent up the stairs.

September was gone like a letter in the mail, dropped in the box and now out of reach. Like a letter on its way, September was traveling.

Bones

by Rebecca Saalfrank

I once was a Georgia O'Keefe print—a bleached, bone-brittle cattle skull baking in a lonely desert gravel pit—and thought, my God, that looks **exactly** like the ancient horse-drawn combines and thrashers rusting away in the barnyard. Desolate iron ribs clanking against each other, reaching out starkly toward the sun setting in the dust. . .